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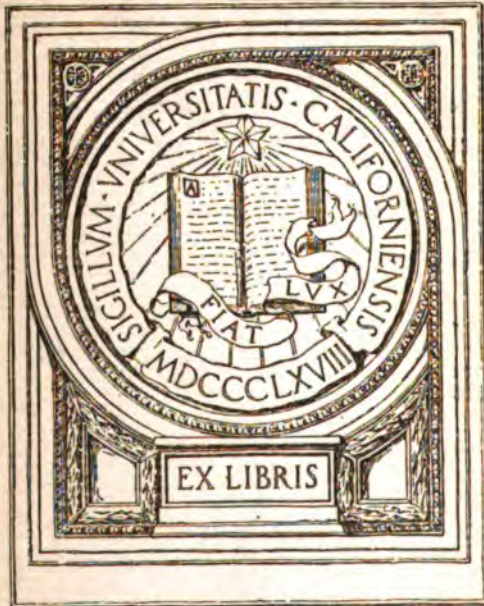
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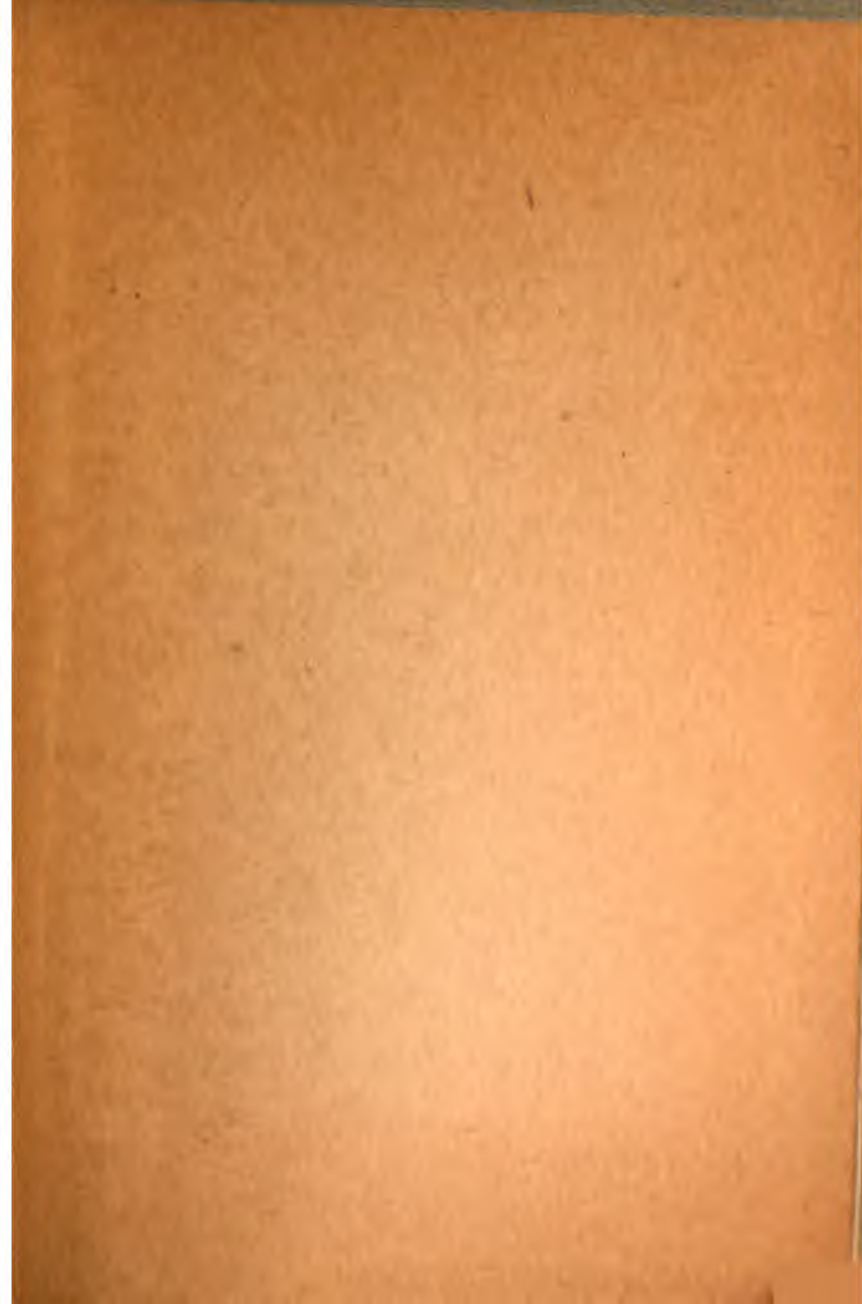
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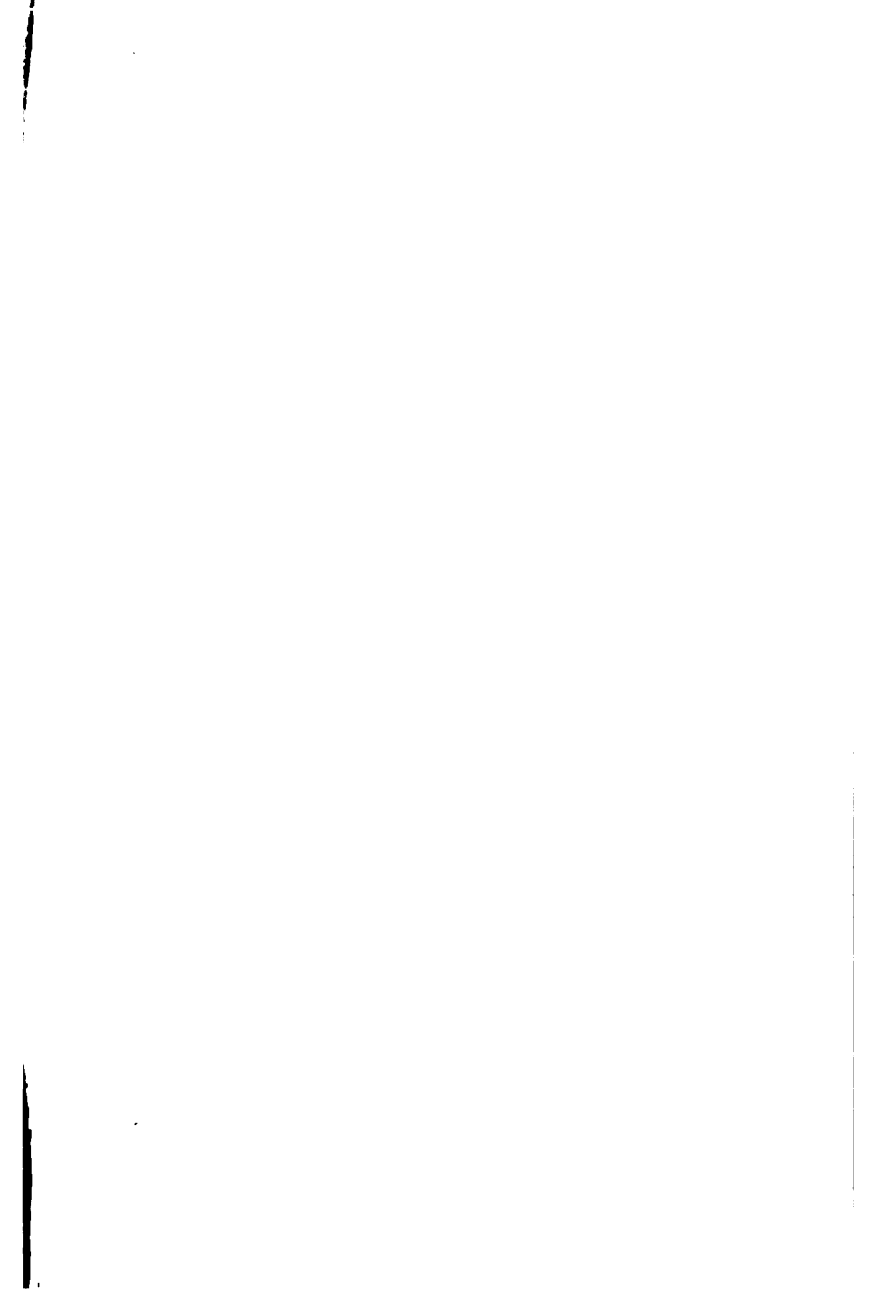
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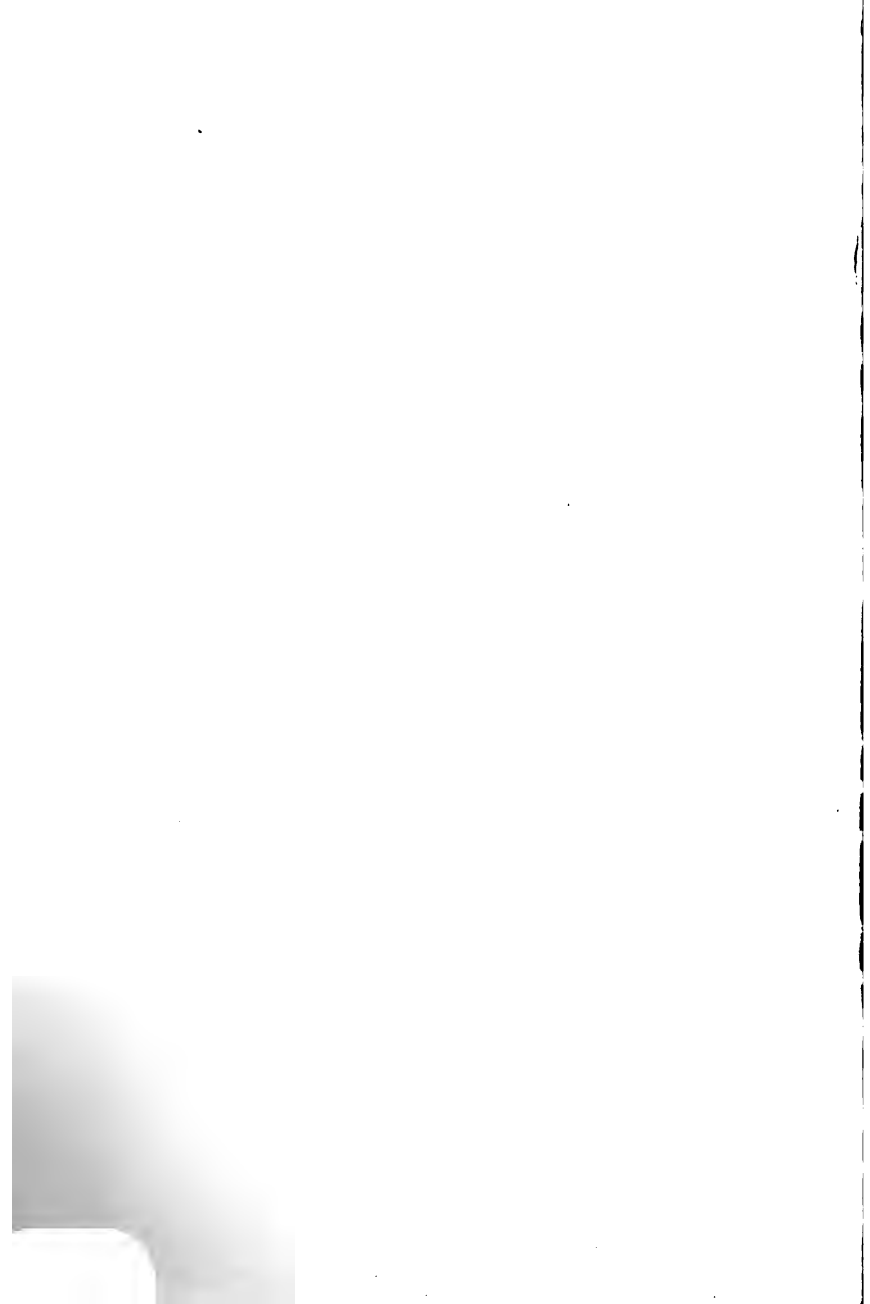


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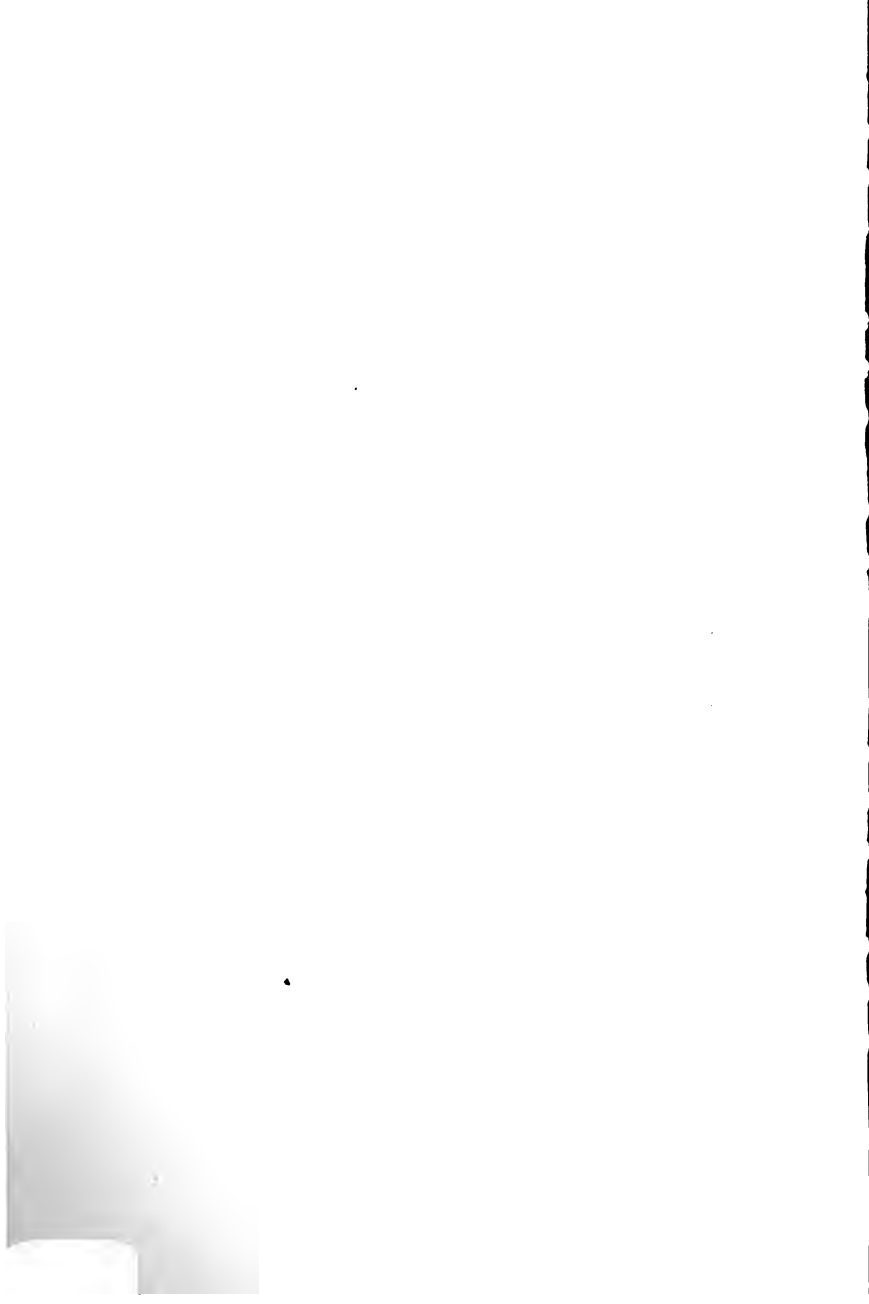
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Oct 12 1922 12 17

Dedicated to
MY WIFE
Who has—"watched for my unworthy sake."

518970



FOREWORD

One day the editor stopped beside my desk and told me he wanted me to write a novel about Los Angeles to appear in serial form. Seven weeks later "Spring Street" was on his desk. I was assigned to write it as I would have been assigned as a reporter to "cover" a big story.

Writing a novel to appear as a serial in a newspaper is vastly different from writing one for publication in book form. "Spring Street" was written primarily as a serial and is offered now as a book in response to requests by friends and from readers of The Evening Herald.

Let me say that I lay no claim to being a novelist because I wrote "Spring Street." I have sufficient pride in my profession to desire to be known only as a reporter.

There are many to whom I owe thanks for their help and encouragement. Especially am I indebted to Dr. Frank F. Barham, publisher of The Evening Herald, and Mr. Edwin R. Collins, Mr. John B. T. Campbell and Mr. Wesley M. Barr, its editors.

THE AUTHOR.



CHAPTER I

HIS father was dying.

John Gallant paced the narrow sun-baked lawn between the porch of his home and the street.

Soon, he knew, the door would open and he would be called inside. That would be the end. A sickening feeling of terror gripped him and his heart pounded in his chest.

He took a step toward the door, which was really an involuntary movement. No, he couldn't go in there. The doctor was in a chair at the bedside, watching, helpless. He would only look up and say again that there was nothing to do but wait.

For a moment he hated that doctor because he sat there without doing a thing. His brain, inflamed and racked by the strain, throbbed in his head. He had a distorted idea that the doctor was making a coldly scientific observation of his father's death, perhaps taking mental notes for a paper to be read to a class of medical students.

He had tried waiting inside. That Mrs. Sprockett from across the street, who was with his mother, had whispered to him to be brave. His mother sat very still in her rocking chair,

her head bowed, her hand pressed to her eyes. He knew she was praying. Unable to hold himself, he had dropped at her feet and buried his head in her lap. He had cried brokenly, his shoulders heaving spasmodically, and he had felt her hand gently touching his head.

They had not spoken, but the feeling that she was suffering with him had assuaged his agony until that Mrs. Sprockett had touched him on the shoulder and spoken to him.

"Do be brave, John, you must be a man now," she had said, and he had rushed outside to begin his pacing, back and forth, back and forth.

He began his walking again, ten steps across and ten steps back. At first he strode furiously, almost running, uttering queer little sounds like a whimpering animal, tears streaming down his cheeks. Now his throat was swollen and dry and his eyes smarted.

A few doors down the street children shouted at some wild game. Suddenly they stopped and he knew that they had been told to be quiet. He thought he saw their frightened faces as they were told that Mr. Gallant was dying. He remembered how he had been shocked to dumbness years before when someone in the neighborhood had died.

A boy passed on the sidewalk and looked at him with widened eyes and gaping mouth. He

hurried by as though he feared that death might steal out from the Gallant house and take him.

Somewhere across the street a phonograph started blaring out a jazz piece. Then it stopped as suddenly as the shouts of the children. A lot they cared, he thought. All his father's death meant to them was the irritation of stopping the phonograph.

The blind on a window of the house next door was pulled to one side, emitting a shaft of light across the path he paced. A head—the head of the little girl his father had so often petted as he strode up the walk when he came home from work—shut off the light. He heard a scuffle of feet and she was pulled from the window.

Mrs. Sprockett's husband, in his shirt sleeves, came over and stood on the sidewalk.

"Is Maude in there with your mother?" he asked.

John looked at him, without a word.

"Beg your pardon," said Mrs. Sprockett's husband, backing away. "She didn't say—didn't leave any word—and the baby—and—"

The crying of the Sprockett baby could be heard faintly.

"I didn't think—I—I——" and Mrs. Sprockett's husband turned awkwardly and went back to the house.

Everything was quiet, so quiet that it startled him. A mocking bird warbled in a tree by the porch. He remembered his father saying one night that there was no music sweeter than its song.

Fragments of memory came to him vividly. His father pulling him from under a bed the night he was punished for stealing apples at the corner grocery store. His father reading David Copperfield to him and their mutual rejoicing when Betsy Trotwood lectured David's firm stepfather. His father closing his eyes and leaning back and a soft smile on his lips as his mother played "Annie Laurie."

These thoughts carried him away so that he stopped quickly when they left him. For a moment he could not realize that death was taking his father. He felt he had been out of his head, walking out there, that it was all a horrible nightmare. He almost began to laugh and dash up to the door to find things as they always had been. He staggered back with an impulse to shout in his agony as realization came back to him.

A wild hope seized him. He had been walking there for hours, for days it seemed, and the door had not opened. Perhaps the doctor was wrong, after all. Perhaps his father had rallied strength and would live. His heart beat exultingly. Perhaps——

And then the door opened.

* * * * *

He knew that his father had left them nothing but what was in the house. He had not spoken to his mother about it. He had been beside her bed until after dawn when, with a gentle sigh, she had slipped off into a merciful sleep.

Mrs. Sprockett, who left them only for a few minutes in the morning, he thanked with a guilty feeling of having not appreciated what she had done. The doctor had spoken to him kindly.

"My boy," he said, "this comes to all of us. Your father passed as gently as he lived. Remember, there's no sorrow nor suffering where he has gone and—be good to your mother."

It was not until after the funeral that John and his mother talked of the life before them. He told her that they would not have to leave their little home, that he would quit school and find work so they could go on together.

"Dearest, dearest mother, you shall be with me always," he said to her. But she replied:

"We owe a heavy debt, John, that must be paid at once."

He saw she was worrying over the expense of his father's funeral. He knew how sensitive she was about debts.

"I can get money somewhere, dearest mother," he said. "Don't worry."

"But where?"

"Somewhere—I'll get it. Please, oh, please don't think about it any more."

He could tell, however, that she could not put it out of her mind. There was a look about her eyes that told him it weighed upon her. It disappeared when he held her in his arms and comforted her; she tried bravely to hide it from him, but it was there, in his mind, haunting him.

He came to his decision about the money for the funeral director quickly. He told her he was going to look for work and went to George Blake at his Spring street gymnasium. Blake, an instructor in boxing, had seen him spar in amateur bouts and had taken him in tow. He boxed because he liked it; never with a thought of ever fighting for money. Only a month before he had refused an offer of a bout at Jack Doyle's Vernon arena.

"George," he said, "can you get me a bout at Vernon?"

"What's the big idea?" asked Blake with a smile.

"I need the money."

"How soon?"

"As soon as I can get it."

"I'll see Wad Wadhams, tonight," Blake

said. "If there's a place on the bill I'll get it for you."

The next day Blake called him to the gymnasium.

"You'll go on in the preliminaries," he said. "Two hundred if you win, a hundred if you draw and fifty if you lose. How's that?"

"That means I must win," John said.

In his pocket as he spoke was the funeral director's bill for \$200.

"You'd better get to work right now, then," cautioned Blake. "You're matched with a tough boy, but if you're in any sort of shape at all you should come out on top."

They went to work. As he roughed it with the young fellows Blake sent against him he thought of his mother. Perhaps, after it was all over and their debt had been paid, he would tell her how he got the money. He couldn't tell her now. She had even tried to persuade him to stop boxing for exercise and if she thought for a moment that he had arranged to fight for money——

A fist thudded against his jaw. Absorbed in his thoughts he had left an opening and the boy in the ring with him was quick to take advantage of it. Instinctively he "covered," bending over with his arms wrapped around his head and body for protection until his brain cleared.

Then, savagely, he tore into the boy before him, jabbing him swiftly with his left glove and suddenly sending over his right with a snap. The boy sank to the floor.

"That's enough, Gallant," admonished Blake. "Take it easy."

He lifted the boy to his feet.

As he pounded at the punching bag a few minutes later he promised himself that this would be his one and only fight in a ring, for his mother's sake.

That night, when he left for Vernon, he told her his first deliberate lie.

* * * * *

He was in his corner. A scrawny youth with a twisted nose, a jersey sweater and a husky voice was tying on his gloves.

"Wot's your name, kid?"

The announcer was bending over him.

"Gallant," he answered, after hesitating. The announcer turned and crossed to the opposite corner of the ring and John's eyes followed him. He saw his opponent, a thick-shouldered Mexican, with flashing black eyes, gleaming white teeth, a broad, deep chest tapering to a slender waist.

The Mexican returned his appraising look, and sneered.

Arc lamps threw a heated white light down to the canvas floor of the ring. The chatter

and rumble of voices came up from the crowd. He looked out past the ropes and saw faces—hundreds of them—dimly through clouds of tobacco smoke. He could only distinguish those at the ringside. He saw Charlie Chaplin, the famous film comedian, looking at him. There was Jack Dempsey, the world's ring champion, towering up in his seat. There was——

"Come on, kid," the announcer was calling to him from the center of the ring.

John dropped his bathrobe from his shoulders and went forward.

"On my right—the Gallant kid," shouted the announcer, pausing for the laugh that came up from the crowd.

"The what?" a voice asked.

"The Gallant kid, he calls himself," shouted back the announcer. "On my left—Battling Rodriguez. One hundred and thirty-five pounds."

John went back to his corner. He rested his gloved hands on the ropes and scraped the soles of his shoes into a box of rosin shoved beneath his feet by the twisted nose youth, who had a towel thrown over his shoulder and a pail of water near him.

Blake pulled himself up beside him.

"Remember, John, keep cool and keep jabbing that left in his face," he said.

John looked out at the crowd. A thought of his mother flashed into his head and he seemed to see her face in the blue haze of smoke.

"He'll try rushing you—he thinks he's another Joe Rivers," said Blake. "Wait for a chance to soak him."

The gong sounded and, whirling around, he went to the center of the ring. The Battler came dancing out to meet him. They touched gloves for a handshake and each took a step back. The Battler moved his gloves in quick little circles and the noise from the crowd stopped. John forgot everything else, the fight was on.

The Battler feinted, swaying his body from side to side, and came at him. He shot out his left hand, jabbing at the swarthy face of the Mexican. His fist struck only the air and the Battler, his lips drawn back, his eyes blazing, crashed into him.

A fist pounded into his stomach and another ripped into his face. He heard a wild shout from the crowd and the Mexican jumped back, smiling. A trickle of blood dropped to his cheek from a cut over his eye. He heard the Battler's seconds shout to their man to "tear into" him. He watched, his left extended, his right close to his body.

The Battler rushed again, swaying from the

hips. John's left fist found its mark. He jabbed—once, twice, three times—and lashed out with his right. The blow glanced off the Mexican's shoulders and they clinched. He felt the Battler's strength in that clinch and he realized it was more than his. The referee called "Break!" and they pushed away from each other.

He must keep his head. The Mexican was fast; he pounced like a panther. Blake's warning came back to him—"keep cool and wait." That was it, wait, wait for a chance to land a blow that would end the fight.

He shot out his left again as the Battler came at him. It missed and the strength he put behind it carried his head forward. Like a flash the Mexican's right crashed to his jaw. John stumbled to his knees. The referee was over him.

"One — two — three — four — five — six——"

He felt his head slowly clearing. What a punch that Mexican had! He must get to his feet and cover.

"Seven—eight——"

He found strength to jump up. He saw nothing before him. He heard shouting, miles away, it seemed. His arms were heavy when he lifted them to his head. He tried to set

himself. His body reeled as the Battler pounded him, his head, his face, his back.

Back across the ring he staggered until he went down again.

"One—two—three—four——" the referee's arm waved up and down in front of his face. His arms, holding up his body from the floor, began to sag. Blood poured from the cut over his eye. Faintly he saw the sturdy brown legs of the Mexican dancing before him.

"Five—six—seven——"

He pushed himself up to his knees.

"Eight—nine——"

He got to his feet, his arms hanging loose at his sides. The Battler swung forward on his toes for another rush. He tried to lift his hands. They were like dead things. He tried to run out of the way of that tornado of blows and he tottered back against the ropes.

The gong rang and saved him.

He sank into the canvas camp-chair that was pushed under him in his corner and gulped at the wind fanned into his heaving lungs by the towel flapped up and down by the twisted-nose second. A sharp pain as the cut over his eye was burned with caustic brightened his brain.

"Has he had enough?" he heard the referee ask Blake, who was behind him.

"No, give me a chance," he gasped.

"Let him try another one," Blake said.

The pounding of his heart slowed and his head cleared so that he could make out the figure of the Battler leaning back in his chair, his arms spread along the ropes, smiling.

A second massaged his arms and he felt life coming back into them. Blake whispered in his ear:

"One punch will end that Mex. boy; try to land it this time."

John nodded. He must land it. He **MUST WIN**. For the first time since the fight started he thought of why he was there. If he could only rest here a minute more—just until his head cleared a little—the gong rang.

He rushed and saw a look of surprise cross the Battler's face as he dodged to one side. He hooked at the black, shaggy head with his left and felt his fist crack against the Battler's ear. He swung his right with all the strength he had in him and grunted as he felt it sink into the Battler's stomach. He stepped back. He heard shouting. He saw the Mexican double over and cover his head with his arms.

"Atta boy!" someone in the crowd yelled.

The Battler uncovered slowly. He went in again, jabbing with his left. It struck the Battler's thick arms wrapped around his head. With a spring like a cat the Mexican was on him. He shot up his right and it pounded into the Battler's ribs. He tried to wrestle himself

out of the clinch into which the Mexican had thrown himself.

The referee tore them apart.

"None of that," he said to the Battler. "Stop holding in the clinches."

The end came a minute later. They were roughing it in the center of the ring and the crowd was on its feet, howling. The Battler swayed far to the right, the glove of his right hand almost touching the floor. John brought his guard down, fearful that the punch the Mexican was swinging was aimed for his body. He started a counter-blow with his right and the Battler's fist rose high and crashed against his jaw.

A white flash blinded him as he dropped. He was down for the count of eight. He was "out on his feet" when he struggled up again. He smiled feebly and pawed in front of him with his left. The Battler brushed it aside and as John fell forward in a last desperate effort to clinch, his right went over. The smack of the Mexican's fist as it landed the knockout punch sounded like the slap of a paddle on water.

"Eight—nine—you're out!"

They carried him to his corner, the Battler on one side, the referee on the other. As through a fog he saw the Mexican dance back to his corner to be received joyously by his

seconds. He saw Jack Dempsey looking up at him, nodding his head and smiling. He saw a terribly anxious look on a pale, strained face he slowly recognized as that of Charlie Chaplin.

He closed his eyes. If they would only let him alone and stop throwing water on him. He could not see out of one of his eyes. They tore the gloves from his hands and the sharp odor of smelling salts bit into his nostrils. His head ached, his lungs burned.

"Come on, kid, get back to da dressin' room," a husky voice said.

He pulled himself to his feet. He was whipped. His only chance to get money to pay for his father's funeral was gone. So weak that his body shook and his legs trembled, hysterical tears sprang to his eyes and he sobbed—gasping sobs that choked him.

The hot tears smarted like salt in the cuts on his cheek as he stumbled up the aisle toward the dressing rooms.

Someone came running up behind him. A hand grasped his arm and he heard a voice say:

"Just a minute, my boy, I want to talk to you."

CHAPTER II

HE LOOKED up into the whimsically comic face of Charlie Murray, famous in film farces—with funny features and gruff ways, but a heart as soft as a mother's. With no idea to whom he was speaking, John Gallant blurted:

"Please, not now—I can't."

"Just a word with you, son; come along, let's get back to your dressing room," said the other without taking his arm from his shoulder.

As they left the arena they heard the gong sound for the opening round of another bout. It brought back to John the bitterness of his loss in defeat and his chagrin. He had made a mess of things. How could he go back to his mother with his face battered and swollen and without the \$200 he had expected to take to her to pay for his father's funeral?

He flung himself on a bench in his dressing room and buried his face in his hands. He sat for a time until he had choked back his hysterical crying and when he looked up he saw the stranger who had stopped him in the aisle gazing at him intently. He saw something in the mild blue eyes of this man that overcame the momentary feeling of shame he felt for

having given way to his bitterness and despair.

"What's your trouble, son?" the stranger asked.

He sat silent.

"Out with it, son, something's wrong somewhere and I may be able to help you."

"Who are you?" John asked.

"I'm Charlie Murray—if that means anything to you. And, believe me, son, I know that something beside the licking you got out there is worrying you. That's why I followed you here. Let's have it; come on, tell me what's wrong. It'll make you feel better."

Before he really knew it, John was telling him his story.

"That's the reason I made a fool of myself," he said. "I couldn't help crying like that. I guess I was too far gone. I don't know what to do now. It will break my mother's heart when she sees me in this condition. It would have helped if I could have handed her enough to pay the funeral expenses."

"I don't know why I've told you all this. Making more of a fool of myself, I suppose."

Murray listened to it all, silently. Then he rose and went to the door.

"Oh, Murphy," he called, putting his head out the dressing room door.

The youth with the twisted nose whom

John remembered as his second answered Murray's call.

"Fix this boy up, Murphy," said Murray. "Patch up his face the best you can and keep him here until I get back. Understand, keep him here until I get back. Don't let him out of your sight."

"I heardja, boss, I heardja," said Murphy.

And Murray hurried out, leaving John wondering, in Murphy's hands.

* * * *

It was just before the main event that Murray came down the aisle and climbed into the ring, brushing the referee announcer, seconds and others into the corners. He stood in the center of the ring and held up his hand for silence. The crowd quieted.

"What is it, Charlie?" someone shouted.

"It's this, boys," he said. "I've just had a talk with the Gallant kid, who was knocked kicking a few minutes ago by Battling Rodriguez. You saw the fight he put up and you know it's only a good, game kid that can fight like that.

"I don't know how many of you saw it, but the Gallant kid—that's his real name, John Gallant—was crying when he went out of this ring and he wasn't bawling because he got licked, either.

"I'll tell you what he told me back there

in the dressing rooms. Do you know why he was here fighting, tonight? He was here to get enough money to pay for his father's funeral. He had to have the money given to the winner and he lost. He didn't tell his poor little mother he was coming out here. He wanted to surprise her.

"Now, boys, the only surprise he'll take home to her is a battered face unless you want to surprise him with—"

A silver dollar spun through the smoke-filled air and hit the canvas at Murray's feet. That started it. For a full two minutes the air was thick with flying coins. They clinked and rolled around in the ring. Bills weighted with coins caromed along the canvas floor.

Murray and a few others collected the money and counted it, standing in the ring.

"Is it enough?" asked a voice from the crowd.

Murray looked up with a broad smile. His hat, held in his hands, was brimming with the money picked from the floor of the ring.

"Five hundred and fifty-six dollars and sixty cents," he said.

"Where's the kid?" someone demanded.

"That's the idea, show us the kid," shouted the crowd.

* * * *

When John was brought back into the ring,

embarrassed, awkward, trying to smile through his swollen lips, the "house" was quiet. Murphy pushed him to the center, where Murray was waiting for him.

"That's for you, Mr. Gallant, with the compliments of the boys out here who know a good, game kid when they see one and whose hearts are always in the right place," he said, handing him the hat full of money.

He felt the tears coming back in his eyes.

"I don't—I can't——" he said hoarsely.

"Oh, yes, you can," interrupted Murray. "You take it and forget about it."

The crowd cheered. A thick-shouldered individual pushed himself through the ropes into the ring.

"For the keed, Meester Murray," said the newcomer, handing him a \$20 bill. "Hee's a gude keed, maybe I help."

It was Battling Rodriguez. He crossed over and taking John's hand grinned out at the crowd.

John felt the tears coming again and was thankful when Murray led him to a corner and helped him down out of the ring.

"One of the newspaper men wants to speak to you," he said. "Here's your man, Morton."

He shook hands with the newspaper man.

"You're not a fighter by profession, though

you're game enough to be a champion. How are you fixed for a job?" asked Morton.

"I need one," John replied.

"Tell you what you do, then," said the other, who seemed to take John's answer for granted. "You come down and see me tomorrow and I'll see if I can't find something for you to do. How would you like to get into newspaper work?"

How would he like it? John felt that nothing in the world would he like better.

"Tomorrow, then, ask for me," said Morton, turning to watch the two boxers who entered the ring to fight the main event.

As he went up the aisle men reached out and shook hands with him. Some of them dropped money into the hat brimming with bills and coins that he still held in his hand. He filled his pockets with the money and handed the hat to Murphy to be returned to that prince of men, Charlie Murray.

* * * * *

With the money given him by the crowd, the \$20 bill Battling Rodriguez added to it and the \$50 he received as the loser's end of the purse in his bout, he had more than \$625 as he boarded the car from Vernon to the city to return home. His happiness was dimmed, however, by the thought of facing his mother, who, he knew, would be waiting up for him.

When he transferred at Seventh and Spring streets and boarded another car a woman gasped at the sight of his face. Murphy had used every trick known to a professional second to doctor his battered features, but nothing could hide the swollen lips, the cut over his eye and the eye that was puffed so that there was only a thin slit between the lids to see through.

He decided that it would be easier upon his mother for him to tell her everything. Then it would be over and done with. She would not worry then as she would if he told her some impossible story.

She was in her chair in the living room when he returned home. He threw himself at her feet.

"Mother," he said, "please."

"My boy," she said, waiting for him to lift his face from her lap.

He felt he could not raise his head. They sat silent for a while and then she put her hands on each side of his head and lifted his face to hers. He shut his eyes. He could not stand to see her look as she saw his condition.

He waited, his battered face upturned. It seemed hours that she held his face, without a word. Then she leaned forward and her lips touched his forehead gently in a kiss.

"My boy," she said and her arms went around his neck.

They rose at last and she bathed his wounds, smiling through her tears. When he kissed her goodnight she whispered again, "My boy." He knew he was forgiven and he went to his room thinking of the adventure waiting for him in the morning when he would meet Morton and begin work in a newspaper office.

* * * * *

He was bewildered when he entered the editorial department of the afternoon newspaper of which Morton was sporting editor. Never had he seen such a busy place.

Telegraph instruments and typewriters clicked and clattered incessantly. Although it was broad day outside, electric lights burned brightly over desks. The floor was covered with discarded newspapers and scraps and balls of copy paper.

Men and boys hurried from desk to desk, back and forth, in and out of swinging doors. As he watched them, wondering if they really knew what they were doing themselves, they reminded him of ants around an ant hill. He was thrilled by the life and energy of the place, the speed and earnestness of the workers.

At a flat-topped desk over which was a sign with the words "City Editor" sat a fat, bald-

headed man wearing a green eye-shade, who spoke over his shoulder to a younger man at another desk close to his. This younger man wore a telephone headgear, receivers over both ears, and punched at the typewriter before him with the first finger of each hand. John saw he was writing what someone was dictating to him over the telephone.

"T, like in Thomas; I like in Isaac; P like in Peter," the man with the headgear shouted into the mouthpiece of an extension close to his face.

John tried to fathom what the man with the headgear was talking about and it finally dawned on him that he was making certain of the spelling of the word "tip," dictated to him, by repeating the letters as they appeared in other words.

He caught sight of Morton at a desk on the far side of the big, high-ceilinged room and crossed over, weaving his way through a labyrinth of desks, chairs and tables. Morton, who had been glancing over a newspaper, looked up as he approached.

"Well, if it isn't the Gallant kid!" he exclaimed. "I'd almost forgotten all about you. Sit down."

John sat down while Morton questioned him. No, he had never done any writing except a little for his school paper. Yes, he'd

like to start in as a reporter. It didn't make much difference how much he was paid as long as he could get started.

"All right, then," said Morton, rising. "We'll go over and see P. Q., but don't you ever blame him for getting you started in this game."

The sporting editor led him to the fat, bald-headed man with the green eye-shade.

"P. Q.," he said.

The city editor looked up.

"Here's the young fellow I was telling you about this morning; name's John Gallant."

"P. Q."—John afterward learned that those were his initials, uniquely symbolical of his perpetual order to reporters to be "pretty quick" in their work—looked at the marks on John's face left by the fists of Battling Rodriguez.

"Fighting face, all right," he said. "Well, suppose you go to work."

He reached back to his desk and brought up a handful of clippings from a newspaper from which he selected a few short ones.

"Grab a typewriter and rewrite these," he said, handing the clippings to John. "Keep 'em short. Twenty-five words each. Remember that always. Keep everything short. Keep your eyes and ears open and read the papers. Read everything in them. Now get

over there and start writing and I'll call you when I need you."

John knew that as long as he lived he would never forget that first day in newspaper work. He rewrote the clippings carefully, counting the words to make certain that they did not exceed the twenty-five ordered by P. Q. He had done some typewriting at school and practiced more by filling page after page of copy paper with the old favorite beginner's sentence, "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party," and its twin, "The quick, brown fox jumped over the lazy dog."

He watched in open-mouthed wonder at the speed with which the other reporters—he counted himself one of them—wrote their stories. He learned that everything written for a newspaper is a "story," everything from a three-line item about a meeting of the Colorado State society to a banner-line murder.

He was fascinated by a reporter whom P. Q. called Brennan and who worked at a typewriter close to where he was sitting. Brennan, thin-faced, about thirty, John judged, turned out page after page of typewritten copy, stopping at the completion of each page to throw back his head and shout: "Boy! Oh, BOY!" at the ceiling. In response to this call a copy boy appeared and carried the page to P. Q. As he worked he smoked cigarettes, lighting

each fresh one from the stub of the one that preceded it. These cigarettes he carefully stood on end on the desk as his fingers pounded at the typewriter.

When he took a deep inhalation of tobacco smoke during his writing Brennan paused and gazed, dreamy-eyed, out into space. Then suddenly, he stood his cigarette on end again and attacked the typewriter keys furiously. John noticed that Brennan, like the man with the headgear, used only one finger of each hand in typewriting.

Along in the afternoon, when he had stopped hammering at his machine, he turned to find John staring at him. Stretching out his arms, yawning, he asked:

"New man?"

John said he was.

"First time?"

John said it was.

From Brennan, John learned many things. He learned that P. Q. had an unswerving prejudice against reporters who used the touch system in typewriting.

"He says they use a typewriter like it was a piano and get into the habit of not looking at what they are writing," Brennan explained. "He says the touch system has ruined more reporters than shorthand."

"Why shorthand?" asked John. "I thought _____"

"I know, you thought every good reporter should write shorthand," said Brennan. "Well, that's one thing P. Q. and I agree on. I've seen a lot of them in my time and I've never seen a reporter who wrote shorthand who was a real star man. Writing shorthand kills your imagination. All you write is what other people tell you and exactly as they said it. Somehow, a shorthand man doesn't get pep into his stuff, take it from me."

John thought he understood.

"You work hard and long in this game and it makes an old man of you before your time," Brennan continued. "But it's a great game. Once it gets into your blood you're a newspaper man for life."

"Generally speaking, there are two kinds of reporters. One is the kind with a nose for news and without any particular ability to write. The other is the kind that can write without being able to get the news for themselves. When you get the two in one, a man who can write and get the news himself, you've got a star, but they are few and far between."

"P. Q. says once in a while that I can write and I think I'm a demon news-getter and there you are—that's me."

"Let me tell you how it is about writing a

story. Suppose Mary Jones, aged 18, of 1559 Fifty-Ump street, shop girl, kills herself and leaves a note saying she did it because the man she loved threw her over. It's no story to write it that 'Mary Jones, 18 years old, a shop girl, who resided at 1559 Fifty-Ump street, ended her life today because of an unhappy affair with an unnamed man.'

"Plain 'Mary Jones' isn't the story. Probably only fifty people in the city know her. What do the others care? Not much. This is your story—'An 18-year-old girl who dreamed of a Prince Charming to come and carry her away from a monotonous life behind a store counter and a dreary third-floor-back room, took her life in Los Angeles today.'

"Get the idea? 'Mary Jones' isn't the story. What she did, how she lived, what made her do it, that's what the story is. That brings a throb of sympathy, a tear perhaps, for her from someone who never heard of her and it helps to make better folks and a better world."

Brennan's way of talking entranced John. He realized there was more in reporting than he had ever imagined. P. Q. seemed to have forgotten him completely during the next few days. In the mornings he was given a few short clippings to rewrite and that was all.

"Don't worry, he's got an eye on you," Brennan told him. "And let me tell you something.

Perhaps you've read stories about the cub reporter scooping the town, landing the big exclusive story and all that. Well, that's bunk. No cub reporter ever did it, not unless he was working against a bunch of other cubs. Why, he's lucky if he knows what to do with a big story when he's got one, let alone put it over on the star men of the other sheets."

A really first-class newspaper man, Brennan told him, was born and not made.

"You can make them up to a certain point, but no further," he said. "And take it from me, the ones that are born newspaper men aren't born every minute for Mr. Barnum or anyone else to get."

It was at noon of the third day he had been at work when John was given his first assignment. He saw P. Q. rise from his chair and look over the reporters at their desks and he heard him call his name.

"Here, Gallant, I want you to do something," the city editor said. "Lawn fete—charity stuff—out at palatial home of the Barton Randolphs. Society affair. Must have representative there. No story. Society editor takes care of that. Just get list of names and how much money they take in. Here's admission card. Beat it."

John was disappointed. He had hoped for something with a touch of adventure. Not

until he left the office did he fully realize where he was going. Society lawn fete! He looked down at his well worn suit and remembered the patch on his trousers beneath his coat tail.

CHAPTER III

THE home of the Barton Randolphs, in West Adams street, was one of the old mansions of that exclusive colony toward which the business district of Los Angeles was advancing, block by block. Set back from the street, its immaculate lawn dotted with shade-giving sycamore trees, it was reminiscent of one of the "stately homes of England." An iron fence topped with spear heads gave it a finishing touch of haughtiness.

John liked to think of homes and of trees as people. A stiffly built, sharply roofed house with "gingerbread" trimmings reminded him of a prim old maid. He imagined that he knew what sort of person owned a particular house simply by studying it. Houses, especially old homes, fascinated him and he worshiped trees with the fervor that inspired Joyce Kilmer.

The Barton Randolph home made John think of a fine old aristocrat, holding aloof from the world, conservative and with a love for old fashions and old friends, a contempt for things that are modern. As he stood at the gate he thought that the mansion was glaring at him with an upturned nose and this imaginative quirk caused him to hesitate to enter.

Before him on the cool green lawn moved groups of men and women, the women in snowy white. At intervals there were tea tables around which were couples, chatting languidly. Servants moved with quiet efficiency from the tables to the house and back again. The shade spread by the sycamore trees was pierced with shafts of sunlight that gave the lawn a mottled look. It seemed a place removed from all the world.

Once more John looked at his shabby suit, his dusty, worn shoes. Unconsciously he tugged at his coat tail because of an instinctive fear that the patch was showing. An idea of waiting outside until the fete was over came into his head.

"It can't be any worse than the wallop Battling Rodriguez gave me, so here goes," he said, starting up the finely graveled driveway with the same feeling he always had when he dashed down the beach to plunge into the cold waters of the ocean.

He tramped steadily along until he discovered that the driveway was circular and that if he kept on he would land out on the street again. Boldly he started across the lawn in the direction of the house. Somewhere on the grounds a stringed orchestra was playing. As he passed the tea tables he heard the clinking of ice in glasses. Looking neither to right nor

left he felt that the eyes of everyone he passed were upon him. He tugged again at his coat tail.

He saw a servant stop and wait for him and he marched straight toward him.

"Tradesman?" asked the servant.

"Reporter," he said, looking straight into the other's eyes somewhat defiantly.

"Whom do you wish to see?"

"Mrs. Barton Randolph."

"This way, please."

He followed, past more tables, past more eyes. He watched while the servant approached the woman he knew to be Mrs. Barton Randolph, who excused herself from the group around her. The servant returned.

"You were sent here from your office?" he asked.

John produced the admission card given him by his city editor.

"Very well. Mrs. Randolph instructs me to tell you that any information you desire may be obtained from her secretary in half an hour. In the meanwhile you are to consider yourself as one of the guests."

He was not long in reaching the gravel driveway again and he was headed for the street, determined to wait there for the thirty minutes, when he noticed that to his left only a few of the tables were occupied. At one of

these he could wait in the shade. Besides, he had a feeling that he was little more than a coward if he went outside.

Far back from the driveway, in fact at the table farthest from the drive, he seated himself with a sigh of relief. For a while he believed himself well alone, before he discovered that directly facing him sat another man, a man lounging in a wicker garden chair, alone, idly smoking a cigarette and gazing at him somewhat intently. Instantly John disliked this man, for two reasons: he was too immaculately dressed and his hair was so perfect that it appeared to have been moulded on his head.

The man continued to gaze at him, and John, feeling his face grow hot, stared back.

Then the man flicked the ash from his cigarette, turned lazily in his chair and raised his hand as a signal to a servant who was hovering over a table and who hurried to him in response. He spoke to the servant and inclined his head slightly in John's direction. The servant bowed and came toward John's table.

"If you're not a guest here, sir, you will kindly leave the grounds," he said.

John felt his blood gush through his veins. He saw the man in the wicker chair smile mildly and look up into the branches of the tree overhead. He overcame a wild impulse to step over and ruin the perfect hair.

"But it happens I am a guest," he said, as clearly as his choked back temper permitted.

"You are, sir!" the servant pretended astonished humiliation. "Would you be so good as to say by whose invitation?"

Then it happened. John afterwards was never quite sure what would have taken place there had it not occurred.

To John she seemed to have blossomed up out of the ground before them. He never saw anyone who looked more like a flower, a delicate, beautiful flower. She was in white, a quaint frock with ridiculously tiny puffed sleeves reaching only halfway to her elbows, gathered in with a narrow black ribbon. Something about her, the way she looked, the dress, the whole expression of her face, sent the thought "an old-fashioned girl" coursing through John's brain.

The servant stepped back.

"Do you happen to be the newspaper reporter—?" she said.

John nodded.

"Then I am so glad to have found you. Mrs. Randolph felt she was rather abrupt when you asked to see her and when she noticed you walking rapidly away she feared you were offended. I volunteered to find you." She was in the chair beside him.

"You are very kind and I am very happy," he managed to say. "I wasn't offended. I was embarrassed and frightened."

"By what?"

"By all this. The servant asked me if I was a tradesman—whatever that is—isn't that enough to frighten anyone?"

"I've read stories of reporters who never knew fear. And in plays the reporter always does the bravest things."

"In stories and in plays," he repeated. "This, too, is like a story or a play. Here I am rescued by a heroine who is—who is ——"

"Who is what?"

"Beautiful." The word was no sooner spoken than he could have bitten off his tongue.

He hoped she would laugh it away, but she only looked at him, her lips parted, a hint of incredulousness in her eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said. He was glad now that she had not laughed or taken the word he had spoken lightly. He felt she knew he had not said it in an attempt at silly flirtation.

"You spoke of being rescued," she said, smiling again.

"Yes, and the villain is yet in the background," he said. "A devilishly handsome villain he is, too."

She glanced back over her shoulder. The

servant had disappeared. The man in the wicker chair was looking at them, a half smile on his lips.

"Surely," she said, "not Mr. Gibson?"

"If Mr. Gibson is the gentleman in the chair over there, yes."

"And why a villain?"

"Well, he whispered something to the servant who was here when you came that caused him to come here and ask me to leave. That was how you rescued me."

"It is like a book or a play, isn't it?"

"Only in books and plays dreams come true," he told her. "And villains are vanquished."

"And what dream do you wish to come true?"

"A dream—a rather silly, hopeless, golden sort of dream—a dream of meeting you again."

Once more he could have bitten off his tongue. Now she would think him a maudlin flirt. He looked to the ground and saw his dusty, worn shoes. He was afraid to hear her speak, afraid to look up. At last he did, expecting to find her gone. But she was there, looking at him as she had when he told her she was beautiful, the same hint of incredulousness in her eyes.

"Don't say you're sorry," she said softly. "I'd like to think you meant it."

They were silent. He saw the man in the wicker chair rise, toss aside his cigarette and come toward them, slowly. They waited, without speaking, until he reached their table.

His eyes met Gibson's steadily for two tense seconds. Then he saw Gibson turn from him to the girl as if he was not there.

"Consuello," Gibson said.

She rose.

"Reggie," she said, "a friend, Mr.——"

"John Gallant," John said, slowly.

"Mr. Gallant, Mr. Gibson," she said. They shook hands.

"I believe I saw Mr. Gallant several nights ago," Gibson said.

John waited, wondering how Gibson would say it.

"He was very busily engaged with another gentleman"—he gave a slight emphasis to the "gentleman"—"whose name, I believe, was Rodriguez."

"Really! You have met before?"

"Come, Consuello," said Gibson, "we must be trotting back to the house. The afternoon will be gone soon."

She saw the look in John's eyes before she answered:

"Reggie, you must excuse me. I'll be along shortly—with Mr. Gallant."

"Very well," Gibson turned leisurely and they watched him walk away.

He was only slightly incensed by Gibson's deliberate insult in strolling away without acknowledging, by even so much as a nod of his head, their introduction to each other by Consuello. He felt a tinge of satisfaction, of even vengeance.

"You mustn't let me keep you," he said, as he saw she still looked at Gibson's retreating figure and that an expression of astonishment was puzzling her face.

"It was wrong of him—I do not understand," she said. She laughed lightly. "But you must not believe him a villain. It was so unlike him. I'm sure he will tell you so himself before you leave."

The hum of starting motors came to them and through the trees John saw the first of the long line of automobiles go up the driveway toward the house. The fete was ending; the guests were leaving. He remembered why he was there; his appointment to meet Mrs. Randolph's secretary. They started across the lawn.

"Mrs. Randolph will believe I'm lost," she said. "I shouldn't be surprised if she has already sent someone to look for me."

"I hope——" he began.

"Yes."

"I hope you do not feel I have been bold," he said. "It was rude and presumptuous for me to say the things I did to you. Please try to understand and forgive me."

"If I say I believe I understand and that there is nothing to forgive, will you think me vain?" she asked.

They reached the driveway. Luxurious sedans and limousines with liveried chauffeurs blocked their crossing. She turned to him, her hand extended.

"Good afternoon," she said. "Sometime, soon perhaps, if you wish, we will meet again; you will hear from me, because—because I—think you meant it." She added the final words lightly and with a smile.

"I did," he said.

She turned to the driveway. An automobile stopped and she crossed over in the gap of the line of motors it made for her. The machine moved forward again, blocking any sight of her as she went on toward the house.

The list of guests and the amount of money netted by the fete he received from Mrs. Randolph's secretary in neatly typewritten lists. The last of the motors were chugging up the driveway as he left. He walked out into the street, toward the car line, bound for his office.

As he waited at the corner for his car a low, rakish roadster stopped before him. He heard a creaking of brakes and saw the back wheels of the machine lock as it came to a stop. He looked up. Gibson was at the wheel, Consuello at his side.

"Mr. Gallant," Gibson called.

John stepped forward. Gibson leaned toward him, his hand outstretched.

"Miss Carrillo has reminded me I made rather a fool of myself back there at the table," he said, smiling. "Perhaps you may understand the position I was in. I offer my apologies."

John gripped his hand.

"Thanks," said Gibson. "You understand how it is."

"Yes," assented John, without really knowing what his answer meant.

"Sorry there isn't room to give you a lift to town," Gibson said, racing the motor and shifting the gear. As the machine moved away John saw Consuello smile and there was an echo of gladness in his heart.

But a disconcerting thought crept into John's mind as he watched Gibson's machine disappear in the traffic. Had she only been kind to him because of an instinctive sympathy, born of good breeding, for his embarrassment there on the lawn? Was she laughing now with Gibson,

telling him of her experience with a flirtatious or sickly sentimental cub reporter? Something in the manner of Gibson as he offered his apology caused this suspicion to spring into his mind against her.

Yes, that was it. She had only pitied him, his awkwardness, his apparent discomfort, his shabby suit, his worn shoes. She had led him artfully into telling her she was beautiful and that he dreamed—he cursed himself as he remembered his words, “a rather silly, hopeless, golden sort of dream,”—of meeting her again. Meet him again? Why, she would probably forget him tomorrow unless she recalled how he had acted and told it as something to laugh over.

What a fool, what a weak, mawkish, insipid fool he had made of himself!

He burned with humiliation. Even if she had been sincere, what would she think of him when Gibson told her of his fight at Vernon with Battling Rodriguez? He could see her, in his imagination, assuring Gibson that had she known he was a prize fighter, a brute who fought with his fists for money, she would never have spoken to him. Of course, Gibson would not tell her why he had fought at Vernon. He felt this instinctively.

He pictured her and Gibson together at all

sorts of places, on a yacht cruising around Catalina island, on the links at a country club, a ball at the Ambassador, racing along the coast road to Santa Barbara in Gibson's expensive car, at the opera and supper later. Then thought of the patch on his own trousers. Oh, what a fool he had been!

When he returned to the office—it was after 5 o'clock—he found it deserted except for Brennan and P. Q. Brennan was squatted on the city editor's desk. P. Q. was leaning back in his swivel chair, his feet perched on the desk before him.

"Well, son, how did you enjoy your afternoon in society?" he asked as John handed in the typewritten sheets given him by Mrs. Randolph's secretary. He glanced at the list of guests.

"I see Gibson's name here—Reginald Gibson—did you happen to meet him or see him out there?"

John was startled. He had heard the reporters tell of P. Q.'s superhuman ability of knowing, without being told, what his men did out on assignments. What made him ask if he had met Gibson?

"Yes—I saw—I met him," he replied.

"You did, huh? Well, you must have been mixing in proper. I wish I'd known Gibson was

out there. Brennan, here, has been trying to find him all afternoon. You don't happen to know where he is now, do you?"

"I saw him leave."

"Alone?"

"No, there was someone with him in his car."

"Who was it?" Brennan asked.

"Miss Consuello Carrillo," John answered, puzzled by this cross-examination.

"Good!" exclaimed Brennan, sliding from his perch on the desk and seizing a telephone book.

"How did you happen to know who it was with Gibson?" asked P. Q., as Brennan disappeared into a telephone booth.

"I—I—met her," John said, his puzzled feeling turning to astonishment.

"Well, well, you WERE mixing in, weren't you?" P. Q. smiled. "Gibson was appointed police commissioner a few hours ago. He's a good man for you to know, because if we're not mistaken he's going to start something that will keep him on the front page for some time to come."

Brennan came hustling out of the phone booth.

"She asked if you were here—wants to speak to you," he said.

"To me? Who?" asked John.

"Miss Carrillo. I telephoned her place to try to reach Gibson. She said he had just left and asked me if you had returned yet. Get in there and find out if anyone's got to Gibson yet about his appointment as police commissioner."

Brennan stuck his head in the booth to listen as John lifted the receiver.

"Hello," he said.

"Mr. Gallant?" it was her voice.

"Yes."

"You see, he did not forget. I did not ask him to make that apology; I only told him I thought he had been forgetful."

"Yes," said John, realizing she was referring to the apology offered him by Gibson.

"Now that he is a police commissioner he will need you, as a newspaper man, for a friend."

"Ask her if he has given any interviews yet," Brennan put in.

"Has Mr. Gibson made a statement concerning his appointment?" John asked.

"No, I don't believe he knows yet that he has been appointed."

"Where is he now?" prompted Brennan.

"Do you know where he went when he left your place?"

"No, I'm sorry, I don't. Home, I suppose."

"Thank you, Miss Carrillo."

"Mr. Gallant——"

"Yes."

"Don't think him a—a—a villain, will you?"

"Why should I?"

"You thought him one at the fete this afternoon. I'm sure you know now that he is not. And remember, we are to see each other again."

"Yes, indeed."

"I won't forget. Good-by."

"Good-by."

"What did she say?" demanded Brennan.

"She says Gibson doesn't know yet that he had been appointed commissioner and that she supposes he started for home when he left her place."

Brennan eyed him shrewdly.

"You seem to know her rather well," he ventured.

P. Q. said it was too late to get anything Gibson might say if they located him into the last edition for that day. He instructed Brennan to see Gibson as early as possible in the morning.

"And suppose you take Gallant along with you. He seems to have got acquainted with Gibson," he added.

"And Consuello," appended Brennan.

CHAPTER IV

THE story that Gibson gave John and Brennan the following morning carried the big black banner headline in every edition—"Gibson Plans Cleanup Crusade," "Gibson Charges L. A. Police Graft," "New Commissioner Wants Police Shakeup." Beside the story, which was written by Brennan, were photographs of Gibson glaring into the camera with an upraised fist. "Action stuff," it was called by P. Q.

Gibson was in his office in a downtown business block when Brennan and John found him.

"How are you, Gallant?" he asked, smiling and brisk. "Glad to meet you, Brennan. Step right into my office, boys. I suppose you're after a story. Well, I'll give it to you."

He handed them each a typewritten statement.

"Read that through and if you have any questions I'm here to answer them," he said.

Two pages of the statement contained a hot attack on the police department. He charged that the department was disorganized, honey-combed with graft, tolerating and protecting vice conditions, inefficient and negligent. He cited the operations of bunko swindlers, gam-

blers and bandits and declared that the city was "wide open."

"The fair name of Los Angeles is being dragged in the mire by grafting politicians, crooks and police grafters," one sentence of the statement read.

In another page and a half he pledged himself to a crusade to clean up the city, announcing that he had been assured of the support of the churches and various business organizations as well as, he believed, "every self-respecting and upstanding citizen of the city."

"I intend to hew to the line, let the chips fall where they may," the statement said. "I'm in this fight to the finish. Vice, gambling, banditry, lewd women and graft must go. Without having received the slightest intimation that the mayor intended appointing me to the board of police commissioners I have been accumulating evidence of conditions in Los Angeles for months. I have enough information now to start firing my guns and I call upon the law-abiding citizens of this great city to stand with me in the fight."

To the statement was affixed the signature, "Reginald Gibson."

"I suppose, Mr. Gibson," said Brennan, "that everything you care to say now is included in this statement?"

Gibson nodded.

"There is only one question I wish to ask you."

"Shoot," acquiesced the new commissioner.

"Have you any intention of entering the race for mayor at the next election?"

"None whatever," Gibson hammered his fist down on the table. "I have no political aspirations. I am actuated only by a desire on my part and on the part of other citizens and organizations who realize conditions in Los Angeles to restore this city to its place as the great metropolis of the West."

"I understand," said Brennan. "I only asked that question in fairness to yourself."

"I'm willing to write out a check right now for \$1,000 to be given to charity the minute I announce myself as candidate for mayor or for any other public elective office," Gibson declared.

"No need, Mr. Commissioner," Brennan said. "We'd like you to stand for a photograph, if you have no strenuous objection."

Gibson smiled.

"I suppose I'll have to," he said. "How do you want me?"

The photographer, called in from another room, set up his camera.

"One at your desk first, Mr. Gibson," he said.

Gibson drew a small pocket mirror and looked into it, smoothing back the hair that had irritated John when they first met because it was so perfect. John saw Brennan wink at him.

"How's this?" asked Gibson, seating himself at his desk, turning toward the camera in his swivel chair and holding a sheet of letter paper as though he had been disturbed by the photographer in the middle of the reading of an important document.

"Fine, hold it," said the photographer. The flashlight boomed, sending a puff of white smoke into the air.

"You had better take another, I blinked my eyes that time," said Gibson.

"Gotcha before you blinked," the photographer explained. "Now one standing if you please, Mr. Gibson. Bend over a little. That's it, clinch your fist and raise it up as though you were going to hit someone. That's it. Fine, thank you."

The flashlight boomed again, filling the room with smoke.

"I dislike this business of posing for photographs," Gibson said. "I suppose it has to be, though."

Brennan tipped another wink to John. This time John winked back.

On their way back to the office John asked Brennan what he thought of Gibson and his statement.

"It's a story, a good one," said Brennan. "One of the kind that's always good. Wealthy young reformer wants to clean up town. Out to clean up the police department. It's always gone big since Roosevelt did it in New York. Lot of bromides in the statement 'hew to the line and let the chips fall where they may,' 'fair name of our great city being dragged in the mire' and stuff like that, but it'll get over."

John was somewhat surprised by Brennan's way of answering.

"And what about Gibson?" he asked.

"Gibson may be sincere and he may not. He's either a comer or a sap. If he means what he says and goes through with it, he'll have the whole city behind him. If he's just doing a lot of grandstanding or if he's playing someone's political game, that's another thing. Just remember one thing, we may need it some time; remember what he said when I asked him if he was out to be mayor!"

John was unwilling to take the skeptical attitude shown by the older reporter.

"If he really has no idea of running for

mayor, what else could cause him to do what he says he will except a sincere desire to keep things clean and straight?" he asked.

"Well," said Brennan, "some of them are out for glory and some of them play a deeper game. Sometimes it's a girl."

John thought of Consuello.

"Maybe he's in love with fair Consuello," Brennan suggested, smiling. "Wants to do something big and glorious to win her."

"I'm willing to give him a chance," John said. "I can't help but think he's sincere. Let's hope so, anyway."

"Gallant," said Brennan, after they had walked half a block without speaking. "I'd give anything in the world to have your faith in mankind. Try and keep it as long as you can. That's the trouble with most reporters. They see so much of the other side of life that they drop into cynicism and that ruins them. You are ready to believe, I am ready to disbelieve. Keep on believing, Gallant. If you're deceived once, twice, any number of times, keep on believing."

John was strangely impressed by these words from Brennan. It was a new light on the character of the most interesting man he had ever met. He wondered if years ahead he

would be saying the same thing to some young reporter.

As P. Q. had predicted, Gibson was in the headlines for the remainder of the week. His announcement of a cleanup crusade although apparently a direct slap at the administration, was followed by a pledge from the mayor to support him.

"What else could the mayor do?" Brennan said to John. "He can't very well sit back while Gibson goes ahead in his campaign to clamp down the lid and clean up the department. He would put himself in a position to be attacked for failure to enforce the law.

"He can't fire Gibson. That would give Gibson a chance to holler that the mayor was afraid of a graft expose and was hand in hand with crooks. If he comes out and fires him as a misguided sensationalist—it would be hard to get that across because of Gibson's holler about graft—it's a confession of his own poor judgment. Whoever wished Gibson on him certainly got the mayor in a jam.

"Suppose he goes ahead and supports Gibson, don't you see what that will mean? It means that Gibson will be mayor. Everybody will say, 'Why didn't our mayor do this before Gibson came along?' Gibson will be the uncrowned king. Why, unless something upsets

him, Gibson will be able to name the next mayor of Los Angeles by simply indorsing the man's candidacy.

"Gibson may not realize all this, but if he doesn't I'll be badly fooled. Whatever his game is, he has the mayor all tied up right at the start. All he has to do is to go ahead with his program of personally conducted raids and exposes. Then he'll be the most powerful man in Los Angeles. When he is that, we'll know for sure whether he was right or not. It's when a man gets power in his hands that you can tell what he is."

Two days after his appointment as a commissioner, Gibson demanded the resignation of Police Chief Sweeney. He gave Brennan and John the story, another typewritten statement, to which was attached his letter to the mayor calling upon him for Sweeney's removal.

"That's a pretty one," commented Brennan. "Now, if the mayor fires Sweeney, Gibson will be able to name the next chief. If he doesn't let Sweeney go, Gibson will be able to holler that the mayor isn't supporting him."

John was still reluctant to believe Gibson's moves were as sinister as Brennan viewed them. There were times when, under Brennan's logic, he began to doubt Gibson's sincerity.

Then Gibson disappeared. For three days

he was absent from his office. Brennan and John sought him at his home, his club, without success.

"He's up to something," predicted Brennan. "There'll be a story popping when he shows up again."

* * * * *

It was Saturday morning when John received a note from Consuello inviting him to spend Sunday afternoon and evening at the ranch home of her father and mother.

"I am keeping my promise," she wrote. "Would you care to visit with me at the home of my father and mother, Sunday? It is such a delightfully interesting old place. I'm certain you will enjoy it.

"If you find yourself able to accept this invitation let me know by telephone and we will arrange for me to pick you up when I drive out early in the afternoon. I do hope you can come."

It was signed, "Sincerely, Consuello Carrillo."

He found her telephone number listed beside her name. The fact that she resided in Los Angeles while her parents apparently lived out of the city puzzled him.

"Town house and old country home," he said to himself as he picked up the telephone to call her.

"Oh, I'm so glad you can go with me," she said. "I have a car. Shall I call for you at two? Or shall I meet you somewhere else you may suggest?"

He thought of the commotion it would cause in the neighborhood of his home to have her call for him there.

"Could I possibly meet you at Seventh and Broadway?" he asked, fearing that such a request might be considered extraordinary.

"Seventh and Broadway at two, then," she said.

A liveried chauffeur was at the wheel of the big touring car in which she met him. It frightened him somewhat to think that such wealth was hers. Curiously, he was relieved when she said:

"A friend is so kind as to place this car at my disposal every Sunday, so I may make my week-end visits home in comfort."

Instinctively John felt that it was Gibson's machine.

As the automobile glided through the city traffic and out to the smooth boulevards of the open country they spoke of Gibson's mysterious absence during the past few days.

"He told me that business, something very important, called him away," she said. "He promised he would be back some time this week.

I suppose whatever has taken him away has to do with his work as a commissioner."

She wore the same quaintly beautiful white frock that John had so admired when he first saw her at the lawn fete at the Barton Randolph home. He saw that her eyes and hair were brown, her lips a coral red, her skin faintly tinted olive. Her features were small and delicately formed. Her feet were positively tiny and he marveled at the natural curve of the high instep.

"Tell me," she said, "what do people think of Mr. Gibson as a commissioner?"

He thought of Brennan's skepticism and the frankly expressed doubt of other newspaper men of Gibson's motives.

"Generally he has the support of the city," he answered. "There are some, however, who impute a selfish desire for political power to his work."

"How ridiculous!" she exclaimed, laughing. "Hasn't he told you he has no aspiration to become mayor or to be rewarded with anything else but the satisfaction of knowing that he has done something for the city?"

"He has, and I believe him."

"Why did people doubt? He has told me that it will be a struggle and has been so kind as to ask me to keep faith in him no matter

what arises. He knows that he will be attacked viciously by the element he is seeking to drive from the city. I believe in him. I think it is such a splendid thing he is doing. I knew that you would feel the same."

Brennan's words, "Some of them are out for glory and some of them play a deeper game, sometimes it's a girl," came back to him. If it was for her, to win her commendation and respect, that Gibson was fighting, then, John thought, Gibson was a modern knight-errant riding into battle against the forces of evil, a twentieth century Sir Galahad. And what a "lady fair" to battle for!

"But let's forget all that for now," she said. "See, we are leaving the city behind us. That is how I always feel when I'm on my way home again. The ranch is home to me, you know. I was born there. I do not know what would happen to me if I was unable to return home at least once every week. It takes me away from all the fret and bother of the city."

John wondered what her "fret and bother" in the city could be except, perhaps, a never-ending round of parties and lawn fetes and social affairs. Why had she to live in the city at all and why wasn't it her machine they were riding in and her chauffeur at the wheel?

"You'll love my father," she said. "Every-

one does. He is such a dear, gentle old soul. He was born on the ranch 72-years ago. And mother's grandfather sailed from New York to Nicaragua, crossing over to the Pacific Coast by foot and in the canoes of natives. At San Juan del Sur he was carried out through the surf into boats that took him to the steamship which brought him to San Francisco. Father's stories of the old days in Los Angeles are a treat.

"Let me tell you one of them. Do you know how Spring street came to be named? Lieut. Edward O. C. Ord—for whom Ord street was named—was one of the first to make a survey of what is now the city of Los Angeles. At the time Spring street was surveyed he was asked to name it. He was in love with the beautiful Senorita Trinidad de la Guerra, to whom he always referred as *Mi Primavera*, which is 'My Springtime.' So when he was asked for a name for the new street he replied gallantly, '*Primavera*, of course, for *Mi Primavera*.' That is only one of the stories he tells of the romance of old Los Angeles."

The automobile, traveling out along the Laguna-Bell road, reached a cross-roads shaded by tall and spreading trees. Back from the road John saw an old house that charmed him. It was of whitewashed adobe, two stories in

height. Entirely around the second story was a balcony of wood, ascended by an open stairway. Wooden shutters were opened at the windows, the sills of which were two feet in thickness.

"The old Lugo ranch house," Consuello explained, catching his inquiring look. "Don Mario Lugo was a sturdy caballero in old Los Angeles. He had a silver mounted saddle, bridle and spurs that cost \$1,500 and he wore an ornamental sword strapped to his saddle in Spanish soldier fashion.

"He owned the San Antonio rancho and when he was 75 years old he owned 29,000 acres of land. His three sons owned another 37,000 acres. Twenty-two thousand acres—the Rancho del Chino—was granted him by the government. Father remembers him well.

"How few of us living in Los Angeles now know of the sleepy little old town it used to be. How little we know or seem to care to know of the old days, the days of adventure and romance. For me, my father's stories of old times never grow old."

It was as John thought. She was an "old-fashioned" girl. How refreshing she was, how different from the girls he saw on Broadway. She was the girl he had dreamed of. This "girl of his dreams" had been a vague picture, but he

realized now that she was the girl who was beside him.

He recalled how bitterly he had felt toward her when he left the Barton Randolph lawn fete, how he had cursed himself as a fool for ever having told her she was beautiful. He wondered if Gibson had told her of seeing him in the ring at Vernon, if they had ever spoken of him at all. He could not think of her now as pitying him as he had when he berated himself after first having met her.

Thoughts of Gibson and Brennan came back into his mind. He believed more than ever that Gibson was sincere. He could not force himself to believe that Gibson would intentionally violate the trust and faith Consuello had placed in him. He knew now that she cared for Gibson, perhaps loved him. There was no doubt that Gibson was in love with her. Brennan was right in one thing, that Gibson was working to win Consuello's admiration, but he was wrong, as he had confessed was possible, in suspecting Gibson of a greed for power simply for power's sake.

Where was Gibson, anyway? What was he doing? What would be his next move? Would the mayor remove Chief Sweeney at his demand?

Their machine turned abruptly into a side road, shaded by widespreading walnut trees.

"We're nearly home," Consuello said.

On either side were orchard trees. The air was quiet, cool. Hedges of pink Cherokee roses lined the road. The machine stopped beside a stretch of closely cropped lawn. On the wide veranda of the Carrillo home John caught his first glimpse of Consuello's father and mother, seated restfully in porch chairs. He saw both had snow white hair.

"Here we are—there's daddy and mamma," Consuello said, waving to them.

They started across the lawn to the house, Consuello skipping a few steps ahead of him. He thought her more beautiful than ever before as she danced before him clearly outlined in her white frock against the deep green of the grass.

CHAPTER V

IN THE cool of the evening, after dinner, they sat on the veranda listening to the reminiscent stories of Consuello's father, the first of the fine old Spanish aristocrats of Southern California John had ever met. Don Ygnacio Carrillo wore a dark blue broadcloth suit with black velvet lapels and cuffs, a spotless, stiffly starched, pleated linen shirt and a loose black silk bow tie. His fluffy white hair contrasted beautifully, John thought, with his skin, tinted a pale amber.

The gracious hospitality of his hosts, so typical of the pioneers of the early southland, had put John completely at his ease. They had eaten from a solid mahogany table which, he was told, had been brought "around the Horn" in a sailing vessel.

Consuello curled herself at her father's feet. Her mother, whose grandfather made the arduous trip across the isthmus which Consuello had described, was the descendant of a New England family who had adopted the picturesque customs of the Spanish family into which she had married. As she sat with them she wore a finely-spun black lace mantilla, or shawl, around her shoulders.

"I promised Mr. Gallant you would tell us stories of the old days in Los Angeles, father," said Consuello.

"Ah, no, Mi Primavera. I would not care to bore Mr. Gallant with such dusty old tales. He is a lad of today," her father stroked her head as it rested against his knee.

"Mi Primavera," My Springtime, how well her father's pet name suited her! John wondered why he had not transferred it to her when she told him the story of the naming of Spring street.

"Do tell us, Mr. Carrillo," he begged. "Consuello has already told me how Spring street was named. Old stories, old homes, the old names of old streets charm me."

"Old streets—old names," said Don Ygnacio, as if to himself. "Si, I will tell you. Pardon an old man if he seems garrulous.

"What is now San Fernando street, my children, was once the Street of the Maids. Was not that a prettier name? Aliso street is from the Castilian 'aliso,' meaning alder tree. In 1829 Jean Louis Vignes—after whom Vignes street was named—set out a vineyard through which Aliso street now runs. Someone misapplied the word 'aliso' to a sycamore tree in front of the Vignes home and that was how the street was given its name.

"Broadway was Fort street. J. M. Griffith built the first two-story frame house in Los Angeles between Second and Third on which is now Broadway in 1874. Judge H. K. S. O'Melveney built the second. Then it was the choice residential district.

"I remember that Senor Griffith spoke to me one day. I think it was in '74, telling me that Fort street was destined to become the most important business street of Los Angeles. How strange his words seemed to me then!

"My friend, George D. Rowan, who brought to Los Angeles the first phaeton seen in our streets, was responsible for the changing of the name of Fort street to Broadway. I remember when he subdivided the block bounded by Sixth, Seventh, Hill and Olive streets and sold 60-foot lots for \$600. Ah, if we had only known in those days what a great city Los Angeles was to become!

"Late in the fifties O. W. Childs contracted with the city to dig a water ditch 1,600 feet long, 18 inches wide and 18 inches deep and the city allowed him a dollar per running foot. In payment for the ditch digging he took land, a large part of which was the square from Sixth street to Twelfth street, from Main to Figueroa. When Childs put this property into the market his wife named the streets.

"Because of the large number of grasshoppers in the vicinity she called the extension of Pearl street, which is now Figueroa, Calle de los Chapules, or the Street of the Grasshoppers. Three streets she called after the trio of Graces. Faith, Hope and Charity. The street she named Faith is now Flower and Charity street became Grand avenue. And can you imagine why these names were changed? Why, because residents of the two streets objected to being referred to as 'living on Faith and Charity!'

"None of us old settlers placed much value on real estate then. Childs gave to the church the block bounded by Broadway, Seventh, Hill and Sixth. In the boom year of 1887 this block was sold for \$100,000 and St. Vincent's college, which had occupied the site, was moved to the corner of Washington and Charity—Grand avenue it is now.

"In those days too, we had a Lovers' Lane. It was a narrow road, deep with dust and shaded by willow trees that followed the line of what is now Date street and Main street was then Calle Principal. There are few who recall where Pound Cake Hill was. It was the hill on which now stands the county courthouse at Broadway and Temple.

"My father often told me of the great horse race between Jose Andres Sepulveda's 'Black

Swan' and Pio Pico's 'Sarco.' Don Jose imported the 'Black Swan' from Australia while Don Pio's horse was a California steed. The race was run along a nine-mile course on San Pedro street in '52.

"Whoever had money to bet and those who had not were in Los Angeles that day, many coming from San Francisco and San Diego. Twenty-five thousand dollars, 500 horses, 500 mares, 500 heifers, 500 calves and 500 sheep were among the stakes put up. The wife of Jose Sepulveda was driven to the scene of the race with a fortune in gold slugs carried in a large handkerchief which she opened to distribute \$50 gold pieces to her attendants and servants to wager. The 'Black Swan' won easily."

John was carried away by the stories told them by Don Ygnacio. He closed his eyes as the old man spoke and into his mind came the pictures of the Los Angeles of other days, the romance and adventure of the drowsy little town that has become the greatest city of the West.

A full moon touched the house, the lawn, the trees, with silver. Consuello, too, he saw, was dreaming of the days of long ago. As her father completed the story of the horse race he paused and they sat silent, the spell of reminiscence upon the elder couple and of imagination upon Consuello and John.

"It is growing late, Mi Primavera," her father said. "If you are to return to the city tonight you must leave soon."

Consuello rose and went into the house with her mother. Don Ygnacio and John stood waiting. Finally, breaking a silence of several minutes, the old man spoke.

"This is the home of my fathers," he said. "All that is left. They counted their land in hundreds of acres. Now only a few acres remain, just as much as you can see. What little is left will go when I go and the Carrillo home will be no more."

John felt the mood of the elderly aristocrat of other days. He stood silent.

"Where you stand Pio Pico once took me, as a child, in his arms. Here we danced and sang and loved and lived and here also will I die."

Consuello and her mother returned and they walked out to the waiting automobile.

"I have never had such a delightful day," John said to her father and mother as they took their seats in the machine. "I thank you—from the bottom of my heart."

"Come often, my boy, the home of the Carrillos is always open to a friend of Mi Primavera," said Don Ygnacio.

They rode in silence for many miles, the automobile humming over the smooth, deserted

boulevards almost as bright as day in the moonlight.

Then Consuello spoke.

"I always hate to leave them there—they seem so lonely," she said.

"You must leave them?" John asked in surprise.

"Yes," she said, slowly, softly, thoughtfully.

She offered no explanation. John wondered why it was. He had always thought of her as the daughter of a family financially comfortable, perhaps wealthy. He recalled that there was no automobile or garage at the Carrillo home and that they were riding in a machine some one had put at her disposal. Her name, he knew, as a Carrillo was enough to admit her to such homes as the Barton Randolphs.

The words of her father—"this is all that is left, what you see around you"—came back to him. Could it possibly be that they were actually poor?

Because it was late she insisted upon taking him to his home.

"Sometime," he said as they parted, "I want you to meet my mother."

"I should like to very, very much," she answered. "And we must see each other again, soon."

"You have already made a dream come true,"

he said. "I shall never forget your kindness."

"Do not think of it that way," she said. "We shall be friends, very good friends, I am sure. Good night."

"Good night and—thank you," he said.

That night he lay awake until past midnight, recalling everything that happened during the day. His thoughts of Consuello gave place to speculation of what had become of Gibson and what would develop with his return in the coming week.

Early Monday morning Brennan and John were called to the city editor's desk and P. Q. ordered them to renew their search for Gibson.

"Drop everything else and don't stop until you find him," he said. "As you say, Brennan, he's up to something and it's up to us to keep our eyes wide open. The mayor is sitting tight on Gibson's ultimatum on Chief Sweeney's resignation and Sweeney's out this morning with a demand that Gibson co-operate with him and the department in his campaign. Get to work now and find Gibson."

"I was thinking," said Brennan, "that Gibson's friend, Miss Carrillo, might know where he was. Gallant here should be able to find out what she knows."

"Miss Carrillo knows no more than we do," John volunteered.

"What makes you think so?" asked Brennan.

"She told me."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"What did she say?"

"Gibson told her that important business was taking him away and that he would be back sometime this week."

"And she has no idea of what he's doing?"

"None whatever."

"Well," said Brennan. "That's that. Come on, Gallant, let's be going."

The first edition of their newspaper carried Sweeney's statement calling upon Gibson to work with him instead of against him and the department in his effort to clean up the city.

"If Commissioner Gibson has any evidence that Los Angeles is wide open, as he says, he should turn it over to the police department and I'll guarantee that conditions will be remedied before morning," Sweeney's statement read. "The police department is functioning. I'll stay on the job until the mayor removes me."

"I deny the commissioner's charge that graft exists in the department and that the city is wide open. Let him come out and put his cards on the table, face up. If he has any reason to hesitate to take me into his confidence, why doesn't he say so. He speaks of the fair name of Los

Angeles being dragged in the mire. I claim he is broadcasting that the city is wide open without tangible substantiation of his charge."

Brennan puffed at his inevitable cigarette as they headed for Gibson's office.

"She said she had no idea where he is and what he is doing, did she?" said Brennan. "How come you thought of asking her about it?"

"She mentioned it to me," evaded John, reluctant to relate the details of his conversation with Consuello. There appeared no reason, he thought, to bring her into the situation precipitated by Gibson's disappearance.

They went over the ground they had covered the week before in searching for Gibson, but were unable to uncover a single piece of information concerning the commissioner's whereabouts. At his office his secretary told them that he had not seen nor heard from him since the day he disappeared.

"Aren't you a bit concerned about his unusual absence?" asked Brennan.

"No, you see he told me he would be back sometime this week and cautioned me not to seek to locate him," the secretary answered.

"Wherever he is, he's certainly covered up his tracks well," commented Brennan as they left.

"What about Sweeney—is he square?" John asked.

"I don't know anything against the chief," Brennan said. "It seems to me he has the town as clean as it has ever been. I think he's straight. I think most of the men in the department are straight. Some of them are grafting—there are always a few crooks in any large body of men—and the chief has always fired them as fast as he found them.

"That's what makes me inclined to believe that Gibson may be off on the wrong foot. That and one other thing."

"What?" asked John, expecting to hear another skeptical dissertation by Brennan on Gibson's motives.

"Because the mayor and Sweeney are hated by 'Gink' Cummings," said Brennan. "If Los Angeles ever had a boss of the underworld, the 'Gink' is the man. He bosses everything, gambling, stickups, bookmakers, pickpockets, bunko men, street walking women and dope peddling.

"He's been out to get Sweeney and the mayor ever since they took office. Whoever the 'Gink's' against you can bet all you have is straight. Until the mayor and Sweeney stepped in the 'Gink' had everything his own way. If the department is as rotten as Gibson says it is then you can blame it on the 'Gink.' Gibson

must know him. I've been wondering why he hasn't come out with a blast about him."

"Perhaps that's why he disappeared—working to get Cummings," John suggested.

"Maybe," said Brennan. "I've thought of that, too. What I can't understand, though, is why Gibson wants Sweeney fired when the chief is the 'Gink's' worst enemy."

That afternoon they heard from Gibson. The secretary of the missing commissioner called them by telephone and they hurried to his office. He handed them a sealed envelope addressed, "Brennan and Gallant." Brennan tore it open and extracted two sheets of paper.

At the bottom of one of the sheets appeared Gibson's signature. It was a statement issued by the commissioner for publication and read:

"I feel that the mayor has had a reasonable amount of time in which to consider my request for the removal of Chief Sweeney. Unless such action is taken by noon tomorrow I will know that the mayor is against me instead of with me in my efforts to clean up Los Angeles. In that event I will endeavor to put before the people of this city satisfactory evidence of my charge that the police department is disorganized, inefficient and honeycombed with graft."

The other sheet was a brief note to Bren-

nan and John which was marked "Strictly Confidential."

"Don't try to find me," it read. "There is no reason for you to worry about my continued absence. Tomorrow night, if the mayor does not ask for Sweeney's resignation, be at your office at 6 o'clock and you will hear from me. I'll probably have a real story for you."

"What did I tell you?" said Brennan, showing as much excitement as John had ever seen him give way to.

Gibson's ultimatum demanding Sweeney's resignation by noon of the next day was printed under another heavy black headline and brought the situation to a crisis. The chief repeated his declaration that he would stay in office until the mayor called for his resignation and the mayor locked himself in his office at the city hall. Only those the mayor sent for, to confer with concerning the predicament in which Gibson's latest statement had placed him, were admitted to his office.

The organizations that Gibson had named as standing behind him in his crusade came out with hastily adopted resolutions indorsing him and stating openly that they would consider it as a "hostile" move if the mayor refused to oust the police chief. Principal among these commendations of Gibson was that of the min-

isterial association, an organization recognized throughout Los Angeles as determined to keep the city clean and free from political graft and bribery.

Tuesday morning the mayor took his stand. He announced that he could not accede to Gibson's demand for Chief Sweeney's removal.

"Commissioner Gibson has failed to furnish me with any evidence to support his charges against Chief Sweeney and the police department," the mayor's statement read. "In the absence of such information, I cannot see why I should ask for Chief Sweeney's resignation. It would be manifestly unfair to remove a man like Sweeney without proof of a sufficient reason for such action."

"It's a war now—war to the finish," said Brennan, who waited at the city hall until after 1 o'clock in the afternoon, half expecting the mayor to accede to Gibson's demand at the last minute or to see Gibson appear with evidence against Sweeney to force his removal. But the mayor "stood pat" and Gibson remained away.

The office was deserted as they waited that night for the call Gibson promised he would make at 6 o'clock. They showed Gibson's note to P. Q. when they reached the office with it and he had given them rather unnecessary instructions to be on the job.

"Don't get lost or wander away," he said.

"I've ordered Benton to be here with you and I'll be at home if you want me in a hurry."

Benton was the staff photographer.

Brennan covered the top of his desk with cigaret stubs, stood on end in his characteristic way, as the hands of the clock neared 6.

"I hope Gibson is letting us have this alone—didn't tip the other papers," he said.

Sharply at the appointed time the telephone bell tinkled and Brennan lifted the receiver.

"Yes," he said. "This is Brennan. Yes, he's here.—Where?—All right, we'll be right down."

"He's at his office," Brennan explained and they started away, the photographer trailing them.

The door of Gibson's office was locked when they reached it. Brennan rapped.

"Who is it?" they heard Gibson's voice ask from the other side.

"Brennan and Gallant."

The key turned in the lock and the door opened. They scarcely recognized Gibson as he stood before them. He wore a peaked cap pulled down over his eyes, a flannel shirt and a well worn suit, spotted with grease and oil. A stubble of black beard covered his face and his hands were black and grimy.

"Come in, boys," he said, laughing. "Something's going to happen before morning."

CHAPTER VI

GIBSON carefully locked the door behind them as they entered and led them to an inner office, the door of which he also locked. The blinds of the window were down in this room and an electric globe over Gibson's desk furnished the only light.

As the commissioner pulled the cap from his head and seated himself at his desk, motioning them to other chairs, John was astonished by the change in his appearance. His hair, usually so perfectly combed, was tousled and unkempt and his eyes were a trifle bloodshot. He noticed that Brennan was also studying Gibson questioningly.

"I gave you something of a surprise, didn't I?" said Gibson with a laugh, as he saw the reporters examining him.

"You certainly did," said Brennan. "I've been trying to figure out what's coming."

"No need," said Gibson. "I'll tell you everything. But before I begin I must ask you to pledge yourselves to secrecy. Not a word of what I am about to tell you must be breathed to a soul until I give permission. I'm going to put my trust in you boys and you must also

agree to go through with your parts in what I am going to place before you. Is it a go?"

John waited for Brennan to answer.

"You can rely on us," Brennan said, and John nodded his assent when Gibson looked to him for confirmation.

Gibson drew a watch from his vest pocket and glanced at it. John noticed that it was a cheap nickel-plated timepiece instead of the thin gold one he had seen the commissioner wear previously.

"I'll have to talk fast," Gibson said. "I haven't any time to spare. Every minute counts now and as I tell you my story you'll understand. Pay close attention because you must grasp the situation thoroughly."

The last admonition was superfluous. Brennan and John were on the edge of their chairs.

"I'll begin at the beginning," he continued. "About a week ago one of the detectives I have employed to help me in my crusade came to me with information concerning a plot to wreck and rob the Southern Pacific passenger train 'Lark' near Los Angeles. He told me that the man planning the robbery was known as 'Red Mike,' an ex-convict with a grudge against the Southern Pacific. He had run across 'Mike' in a Los Angeles street rooming house.

"This detective gained 'Red Mike's' confidence and he wanted him to join with him in the wrecking of the 'Lark.' My detective learned from 'Red Mike' that he planned to throw the 'Lark' into a ditch by placing a derailler on the track at a point in the hills a short distance from the city and to rob the mail car in the confusion of the wreck.

" 'Red Mike' said he could not carry the thing through himself, that he needed a partner, someone to help him carry away the loot and drive an automobile in which they were to escape over the border into Mexico. My detective told me that 'Red Mike' was desperate and knew his business.

"When I heard this story I decided to thwart 'Red Mike' myself. I told my detective I would act the part of 'Red Mike's' partner and frustrate his fiendish plot at the last minute so that I could have evidence enough to send him to the penitentiary for life. I outfitted myself in the clothes in which you see me and bought a car so that my disguise as a rent-car driver would be complete."

Brennan lighted a fresh cigarette, carefully standing its predecessor on end on Gibson's highly polished table.

"When I disappeared from my office I went with my detective to 'Red Mike.' We had to

work carefully so as to get 'Red Mike's' complete confidence. I have been living with 'Mike' ever since and tonight he means to go through with it. He has everything ready. Last night he took me to where he plans to wreck the 'Lark' and we rehearsed what we are to do. We are to put the derailer on the track, send the train into the ditch and, during the confusion, rob the mail car and make our getaway in the machine.

"And this is how I have arranged to save the 'Lark' and get 'Red Mike' red-handed. The Southern Pacific superintendent knows all this and will bring the 'Lark' to a stop as close to the derailer on the track as he can. My detectives will be hidden all around. As the train pulls to a stop they'll close in and everything will be over."

John gasped at the sheer audacity of the story as it fell from Gibson's lips. He saw Brennan, his eyes glittering, nervously taking deep inhales of tobacco smoke.

"Now, this is what you are to do," Gibson continued. "You will go with my detectives and see the whole show with your own eyes. You will be the only reporters with them. I am to meet 'Red Mike' at 7 and go with him. You can understand how essential it is that everything goes just as I planned it. If there's a slip-up anywhere it means my life. 'Red

Mike' has told me that he'll kill me if he finds that he has been double-crossed.

"That's all I need to tell you, I think, except that you will meet my detectives outside this building at half past seven. I'm doing this to save the lives of the passengers on the 'Lark' and to show the people of Los Angeles that the detectives of the police department, as I have charged, aren't on their jobs. It should convince them that there is something at least in what I have been saying."

He glanced at his watch again.

"It's half past six now," he said. "I must get out of here. 'Red Mike' is waiting for me and I can't let him become suspicious."

He rose from his chair.

"By the way, have you boys guns?" he asked. Brennan and John answered negatively by shaking their heads. He reached into a drawer of his desk and drew out two automatic pistols.

"My detectives will carry rifles and sawed-off shotguns," he said, handing the pistols to the reporters. "You boys might as well have these."

He hesitated, a half-smile on his lips.

"You may need them," he added.

John saw Brennan look at Gibson with what he thought was unbounded admiration. The commissioner held out his hand.

"Well, Brennan," he said. "What do you think of it?"

"It's a peach," Brennan said, taking Gibson's hand. "And here's luck, Mr. Commissioner. I'll hand it to you, you've got nerve."

Gibson smiled again as he turned to John.

"And you, Gallant?" he asked.

"I hope——" he began.

"I know you do," Gibson said. "Do you know why I let you and Brennan in on this?"

Oddly, a thought of Consuello came into John's mind.

"Well," Gibson explained, "I saw you that night you mixed it with Battling Rodriguez out at Vernon. I knew I could trust any man who took what you got and kept going until you dropped."

"Thanks," John managed to say.

Gibson opened the door to his outer office and caught sight of Benton, the photographer, waiting there.

"What about your photographer?" he asked.

"We'll take care of him," Brennan gave the assurance.

"All right, see you later," said the police commissioner, going out and closing the door behind him. They heard him hurrying away. John looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes to seven. Brennan stood still, watching the door through which Gibson had gone for several minutes and then turned quickly.

"Well?" he said.

"What do you say?" said John.

"Let's go," Brennan said snapping out his words. "We're in on something big."

The photographer followed them to the elevator and down to the street where they waited for Gibson's detectives.

"What's doing?" Benton asked.

"Can you work that camera of yours with a load of buckshot whistling by your head?" asked Brennan.

"Hot stuff, huh?" Benton asked, eagerly. John saw that the photographer's face actually brightened at the prospect of something out of the usual. Brennan told him, in short graphic sentences, what was before them.

"Gosh darn!" Benton ejaculated. "Hot dog and sweet puppies!"

As an outlet for his excitement he danced a queer little jig on the sidewalk, muttering a rhythmic verse as he shuffled his feet. At the termination of each heavily accented line he slapped his right foot down loudly. As he jiggled his voice grew louder until John could discern the familiar lines from Kipling:

"It was 'Din! Din! Din!'
'Ere's a beggar with a bullet through 'is spleen;
'E's chawin' up the ground,
An' he's kickin' all around;
For Gawd's sake, git the water, Gunga Din!"

In a few minutes three automobiles, following each other closely, wheeled into the curb. A man in the front seat of the first car motioned to them.

"Brennan and Gallant?" he asked, brusquely.
"Who's that with you?"

"Our photographer," Brennan explained.

"All right, get in."

They clambered into the tonneau and the machine shot away from the curb, followed by the other two.

"Well, we're on our way," said Brennan, settling back in the cushions.

Absent-mindedly Benton resumed his half chant song.

"You may talk o' gin and beer,
When you're quartered safe out 'ere,
An' you're sent to penny-fights an'
Alder—SHOT-IT——"

The crowds on the streets as the three automobiles wove their way through the traffic were that curious mixture of workers leaving late for their homes and pleasure seekers coming downtown for the first performances at the motion picture theaters, which is such an interesting spectacle on Broadway, Spring, Hill and Main streets at twilight. In the fading light of the day the electric signs sparkled with less brilliancy than they show when it actually is night.

Like some huge disjointed monster with thousands of glaring eyes the long line of automobiles moved slowly along the streets, only a yard separating them. Street cars formed in an almost solid line along the tracks. Lights in the upper story rooms of the business blocks snapped out, one by one, like the blinking of fireflies.

John looked into the faces of the throng hurrying along the sidewalks and thought how strange it was that none of them even remotely realized that an attempt to wreck the "Lark" was to be foiled within a couple of hours. The automobiles passed unnoticed in the everlasting flow of traffic. Tomorrow morning, he thought, these people would read of what had occurred and hail Gibson as a hero. The police commissioner, already the most discussed man in the city, would then be accepted unqualifiedly as a crusader not only sincere but courageous.

It was a great move! There could be no doubt of Gibson's courage and rightful purpose now. He was facing death to save others and to defeat an attempted horror. How like a "thriller" it was to be rushing toward such a gripping scene!

What if "Red Mike" discovered at the last minute that he had been trapped? Then it would be only a question of the first shot between him and Gibson. Suddenly John thought

of Consuello. How proud she would be made by Gibson's dramatic coup! John envied Gibson in that moment which he now pictured, when Gibson would meet Consuello after it was all over.

The automatic that Gibson had given him dug into his side as he slouched back in the seat. He drew it and put it into his coat pocket. The touch of the cold steel brought home to him that he, too, was to be a participant in the frustration of the train wrecking.

Out of the downtown traffic the three machines increased their speed. John glanced at his watch. It was a quarter past seven. At eight o'clock the "Lark" would pull out of the Arcade station loaded with men, women and children, little suspecting the danger from which they were to be saved. What if something should go wrong? Suppose "Red Mike" was already at the scene, making it impossible for Gibson's detectives to surround him without being seen?

Night was settling down rapidly. He noticed there was only a quarter moon and realized that the darkness had been a part of "Red Mike's" nefarious plotting. He turned to Brennan, whose tensely set face was lighted for a fraction of a second by the accelerated burning of his cigarette as he took a deep inhale.

"I don't like to be a 'Gloomy Gus,' " Bren-

nan said, "but what was it General Wolfe said before the battle on the 'Plains of Abraham' at Quebec—'The paths of glory lead but to the grave'—wasn't it?"

John almost resented the inference of "glory seeking" by Gibson, and Brennan's cool way of suggesting that the commissioner might meet his death. Brennan seemed to sense his unspoken exception to what he had said.

"Oh, don't misunderstand me," he said. "It only popped into my head, I don't know why. And Wolfe, you know, was a braggart who made good. He died on the 'Plains of Abraham' after distributing Montcalm's army of Frenchmen all over the landscape."

John blamed Brennan's cynicism for preventing him from viewing Gibson as he did.

At a word from the man beside him the driver of their car slowed down the machine and brought it to a stop. They could hear the creaking of brakes on the other machines following them as they stopped close behind.

"Here we are," said the man, leaving the front seat of the car. "Duck that cigarette, Brennan. Remember, no smoking or talking. You boys follow me and do what I tell you. One misstep and you're liable to get the commissioner killed. And you"—he turned to Benton—"don't you try shooting any pictures until Mr. Gibson gives the word, understand?"

John counted fourteen men from the two other machines. They walked silently along a dusty, narrow path breaking off from the road until they reached a point where the steep slope of a hill confronted them.

"Now, boys, everyone understands what is to be done?" asked the man from the automobile that had carried the reporters and who John realized was in command.

The men nodded.

"Then scatter out the way we've planned it and remember, we close in on them when Gibson gives the signal, not before."

A queer, nervous feeling gripped the pit of John's stomach as he followed with Benton and Brennan behind the man who led them up the hill as the others branched out in pairs through the brush, spreading out in a semi-circle.

"They each have their stations," the man told Brennan. "They know what to do."

Reaching the crest of the hill they swung down the embankment to their right and stopped behind a clump of bushes. Below them, a hundred feet down, John made out the railroad track. To the left they looked down into a deep gully. On the other side of the track was a deep ravine, dropping abruptly from the roadbed.

"They'll wait down there," the detective

explained, pointing to the gully. "He'll put the derailer on the track so as to throw the cars over to the other side in that ditch."

He squatted down behind the clump of bushes and the others followed his example. John looked at his watch. It was ten minutes to eight.

"It's due here at 8:18," said the detective.

"I'd give ten years of my bright young life for a cigarette," said Brennan, sighing heavily.

The detective produced a thick moist plug of chewing tobacco, gnawed at the corners.

"Here you are," he said, offering it to the sufferer.

"Don't, don't," said Brennan, waving it aside. "I'd swallow it sure."

John felt his heart thumping against his ribs. Try as he might he could not stop himself from breathing in quick, short little gasps. This detective and his men were so certain about things. How did they know but something might have gone wrong? Perhaps Gibson and "Red Mike" were "shooting it out" along the road somewhere now. He looked again at his watch. It was three minutes to eight. Only seven minutes had passed since they arrived. Incredulous he held the watch to his ear. It was ticking regularly.

Benton pulled himself on his elbows to John's side.

"You may talk o' gin and beer,
When you're quartered safe out 'ere—" he began.

"That's enough of that," ordered Brennan, and Benton's chant stopped.

The detective raised himself to his knees and held his head high, listening. The roar of a motor being raced as it was switched off came to their ears.

"That's them," said the detective. "That was Gibson's signal. He was driving and he raced his engine to let us know when they got here."

They waited for years, it seemed to John, until two dark figures, scarcely discernible came down the tracks toward them and turned into the gully. He saw that Gibson and "Red Mike" were carrying something heavy between them and that "Red Mike" also carried a short-handled sledge hammer.

He strained his eyes trying to follow the figures into the darker shadows of the gully from which they emerged shortly.

"That's the derailer they're carrying—they're going to slap it on the rail," breathed the detective.

They could hear "Red Mike" grunting as he and Gibson struggled up the side of the road-

bed. They saw "Red Mike" adjust the derailer to the rail and Gibson kneel to hold a spike as it was hammered into the tie by "Red Mike" wielding the sledge hammer. The blows of the hammer sounded sharply on the still night air. They heard "Red Mike" curse viciously as he missed hitting the spike and Gibson jerked his hand away a fraction of a second before the sledge would have smashed it against the rail.

Four spikes were driven to hold the derailer. Then Gibson and "Red Mike" scrambled back into the gully, their figures hidden in the darkness.

"All set down there," whispered the detective, thus conveying to the others the realization that the derailer was in place to swerve the guiding wheels of the big locomotive of the "Lark" and send it crashing into the ditch, pulling and overturning the coaches with it.

The horror of what might happen terrorized John for a moment. His body tingled and perspiration broke out on his forehead. He closed his eyes. He imagined he would hear the roar of the train as it crashed into the derailer and rolled over the embankment—the screams and cries of the dying and injured. A sickening feeling swept him. He was faint. He could hear Brennan breathing deeply, the

bring the heavy train to a stop before the locomotive wheels struck the derailer seized him.

The detective was on his feet, rifle ready to be thrown to his shoulder. Brennan leaped up and John saw that he held the automatic in his hand.

Then the sound for which they had so anxiously waited came up to them from the track below. They could hear the brakes grinding and shrieking against the wheels of the locomotive and the coaches.

The detective dashed through the brush, stumbling and falling almost headlong as he pitched himself down into the gully. Brennan, John and Benton were at his heels. John's right hand gripped the automatic Gibson had loaned him.

There was a shot, a curse, another shot. Then it seemed to John a thousand shots were fired. He saw the detective throw the rifle to his shoulder and there was a spurt of flame after a quick aim. In a descending circle he saw the flash of guns fired by the other detectives coming down from the hilltop. He saw Brennan—and it surprised him—shooting down into the gully “throwing” his shots in the cowboy fashion he had read of.

He tripped and fell, the automatic flew from his hand. When he got to his feet, slightly stunned by his fall, the shooting had stopped.

He ran into the pit of the gully at reckless speed.

He saw Gibson on his back on the ground, two men kneeling at his side, tearing his shirt from his shoulder. He saw a crimson stain spreading on Gibson's shirt. A few yards away he saw "Red Mike" spilled in a heap, hemmed in by a ring of Gibson's detectives each with a sawed-off shotgun pointed down at him.

"Where's that damned photographer?" Brennan demanded.

"Coming," they heard a voice shout and Benton was beside them, screwing his camera into his tripod as he hurried forward.

"Gibson?" asked John, panting.

"He's all right—bullet scratch on the shoulder—that's all—he got 'Red Mike,' I guess," Brennan answered in jerks.

John looked toward the train. The cow-catcher of the locomotive, which stood panting like some frightened, trembling animal, was less than five feet from the derailer! He saw the engineer of the train lift his cap from his head and scratch his forehead with a finger as he contemplated how close his engine had been to destruction.

Turning he found Gibson on his feet, pale and haggard, his hair tousled, his arm bandaged to his side, posing in the center of a group of detectives for Benton and his camera.

The flashlight boomed and a ghastly white light lit up the scene for the briefest fraction of a second.

He followed Gibson and the detectives to where "Red Mike" lay sprawling on the ground. Electric torches held by other detectives put the desperado's prone figure in an arc of light.

Gibson looked down at "Red Mike" in silence.

The wounded man—John could tell that "Red Mike" was fatally wounded—turned over on his back, groaning. His face, covered with a stubble of red beard, was drawn in pain and his eyes seemed dulled. Groaning again he lifted his head and his eyes fixed on Gibson.

"You ———!" he snarled.
"You crossed me, you ———!"

Then he dropped back into unconsciousness.

Six of the detectives lifted his limp body and, staggering under the load, started toward the road and the automobile Gibson had driven. They paused only long enough for Benton to snap another flashlight.

By that time the passengers—who, when the train pulled to a sudden stop that was followed by a fusillade of shots, believed it had been halted by bandits—had recovered from their confusion and were pouring out of the coaches, swarming toward the locomotive. A stout wo-

man, whose short hair straggling to her bare shoulders indicated that she had been preparing to retire, screamed and fainted into the arms of a little man who struggled desperately to save her from falling to the ground. Benton set up his camera on the track and his flashlight boomed again as he made a photograph of Gibson standing beside the derailer, the locomotive in the background.

With much pointing of fingers and nodding of heads it was whispered through the crowd that Gibson was the man who had prevented the wreck and shot "Red Mike," who had been rushed away to a hospital in the machine in which he and Gibson had driven to the scene. Men and women in various stages of dishabille, unconscious of their appearance, pressed around him, shaking his hand. A girl threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. To John it was strikingly similar to the scene of an averted train wreck he had once inadvertently seen in a motion picture—if the girl had been Consuello, dressed, say, in a neat and dashing riding habit or some other altogether inappropriate costume.

A fat, white-haired man—typical bank president, John thought—wrote out a check, using the cowcatcher for a desk, and handed it to Gibson with a bow.

John, standing near them, saw the check was for \$5,000.

"I cannot accept this for myself, sir," Gibson said. "I am a police commissioner of the city of Los Angeles and if you will permit me to make such disposition of it I will turn it over to some well deserving charity."

"It's yours—do what you want with it," the fat man said. As he walked away John thought that he was fully pleased with himself for having given Gibson the check, that he had paid the man who had saved his life in dollars and cents and what more could he do?

"Somebody give me a cigarette," he heard a voice plead and, turning, he found himself face to face with Brennan.

"Quick, someone, that man has a weapon!" a woman shrieked.

John saw Brennan's automatic protruding from his coat pocket. Brennan, who was talking to Gibson, did not notice him take the pistol from him.

"How did it happen, Mr. Commissioner?" Brennan asked.

"Come along, I'll tell you as we ride back to the city," promised Gibson, who shook the hands thrust out in the path that was opened for him as he walked through the crowd toward the road and the waiting automobiles.

Returning to the city, Gibson told his story.

"Red Mike," he said, did not become suspicious until a second or so before the engineer applied the brakes to the train and then his suspicion seemed born of instinct. At the first sound of the screeching brakes, he said "Red Mike" shot at him and he fired back.

"I was lucky—my first shot got him," Gibson said. "He went down, but he continued firing. He was shooting wild and I wasn't half as afraid of his shots as those my men were raining down from the sides of the hill.

"I hope," he said, with a touch of regret, "that 'Red Mike' doesn't die. He's a bad one, as bad as they come, and should be put some place where he can't do harm. I hope, though, that he recovers."

"He hasn't much to live for," Brennan put in.

"No," said Gibson. "He told me that he had been blacklisted by the railroads because he was an I. W. W. Revenge was as much a part of his motive in attempting to wreck the 'Lark' as robbery. I really believe he might have got away with it if——"

"If you hadn't been there," John completed the sentence for Gibson.

"Thanks, Gallant," Gibson acknowledged. "Of course, boys, I'll have to talk to the morning newspapermen when they find me, but you saw the whole thing for yourselves and you've

got the only pictures made out there where it happened."

"The A. M.'s will get the break on the story, but we'll have the edge on them at that," said Brennan. "It was too late, you know, for us to come out with an extra unless you had permitted us to tell our city editor what was coming off."

They left the automobile when it reached their office.

"I'm on my way home now to get this doctored up," said Gibson, inclining his head to his bandaged shoulder. "I want a bath and a sound sleep. I haven't had either since I met 'Red Mike.' Good night, boys, see you, tomorrow."

As they went into the office to telephone P. Q. what they had seen and what the first edition in the morning, John, feeling certain of a different answer than those he had received in the past, asked Brennan what he thought of Gibson now.

"He's got nerve, all right," Brennan said. "But——"

"But what?" asked John, wondering what possible criticism Brennan could have in view of Gibson's display of courage.

"But," said Brennan, "he's a grandstander."

"A grandstander?" exclaimed John.

"You said it, after me," said Brennan. "A

grandstander, a man who plays to the crowd instead of playing the game for what it's worth."

A surge of exasperation went through John. Was this man incapable of ever believing anything or in anyone?

"Good heavens, Brennan!" he said, hotly. "He risked his life, didn't he?"

"I said he had nerve."

"He did it to save others, didn't he?"

"Others?" said Brennan sarcastically. "Others? Bosh! He did it to be a hero, for public acclamation, for glory, for power. Others? Why, don't you see that he risked the lives of all those others you say he saved just to make himself a hero?"

Brennan's answer, the sarcastic way he gave it, maddened John.

"Ah, you make me tired," he said in his aggravation. "What do you want to look at it that way for? You tell me to keep my faith in men, to believe as much as I can, and then you talk this way."

Apparently ignoring what John said, Brennan telephoned to P. Q.

"Hello, P. Q.," he said. "This is Brennan. Gibson has pulled off a great stunt, great story. The mornings' will have the break on it, but we have the only pictures and lots of eye-witness stuff."

He proceeded to give what even John admit-

ted to himself was an accurate account of the attempt to wreck the "Lark" and how Gibson had saved the train and "shot it out" with "Red Mike."

Hanging up the receiver he looked around to find John standing waiting for him. Lighting a fresh cigarette from the butt of the one he had finished he motioned to John to sit down.

"Now, Gallant, you listen to me for a while," he said. "You can believe what I'm going to say or not, but I'm going to tell you a few things. And don't get the idea I'm just talking for the sake of hearing myself blatt.

"Hasn't it ever occurred to you that Gibson didn't have to go through with this business tonight at all? When he discovered that 'Red Mike' was going to try to wreck the 'Lark' he could have had him arrested right then and sent him up for a good long stretch.

"He didn't have to let things go as far as he did. He could have stopped it right there. Why, he actually endangered the lives of everyone on that train simply to make a big show of it. There wouldn't have been so much glory in it for him to have arrested 'Red Mike' when he found out what he was planning to do.

"Sure, he had nerve. He did what few of us would want to do, even if we were forced to. 'Red Mike' got no more than he deserved, but

I can't help thinking of him as something of a victim of Gibson's lust for glory and power just the same. A really great man doesn't have to make a display of his courage like Gibson did. A really great man would have been satisfied by the realization that he had prevented a disaster without endangering the lives of others.

"That's why I say Gibson is a grandstander, Gallant. Understand, when I say he's a grandstander I don't mean that he isn't sincere in his crusade to clean up the city. He's simply a grandstander in the way he does things and that makes it impossible for him to ever be a truly big man.

"Grandstanders often make good, but not in the way some of us would like. Oftener they fall down, tripped up by their insatiable desire for public acclaim. Full reward should be given to those who do big things, but they shouldn't do them for the reward. They should work for the satisfaction their accomplishments bring to themselves, within themselves."

"I saw you shooting at 'Red Mike' yourself," said John.

"Certainly," said Brennan. "Don't think I class Gibson with criminals like 'Red Mike.' It was either his life or 'Red Mike's' and what choice was there? I confess, though, it was the

excitement more than anything else that made me shoot."

They were silent for a few minutes.

"Think it over, Gallant," said Brennan, rising and putting a hand on John's shoulder. "I may sound like a cynic, but I'm not. There's one thing that disgusts me more than anything else and that's selfish hypocrisy. I look for the real things in life and I've been disappointed so often that I frequently misjudge.

"Remember we're newspaper reporters. Whatever we think, whatever we feel, about things must be kept to ourselves. It isn't our opinion that people want to read. It isn't how things look to us, but facts, truth, accuracy, that we must write. Opinions we must leave to the readers to form for themselves and it is unfair to give them untrue impressions for them to form their opinions from."

John carried Brennan's words home with him. Until he dropped off to sleep he thought them over. Perhaps Gibson was a grandstander, a glory seeker, after all—but was he to be blamed if what he sought above all else was the admiration of one like Consuello?

Gibson's heroism in preventing the wreck of the "Lark" covered the front pages and scattered throughout the inside pages of the morning papers. The whole city talked of him. There were more resolutions of commendation

and he was termed the "fighting crusader," the "man of the hour."

Spread across the front page was a statement issued by Gibson and carried under the headline of "Gibson Hits at Police." In this statement Gibson again condemned Sweeney as inefficient.

"If my detectives, working where Sweeney's men ought to be, had not discovered 'Red Mike's' plot the 'Lark' would have been wrecked last night, scores killed, the mail car robbed and 'Red Mike' would have been over the border today," a part of the statement read.

It was a telling blow to the mayor and Police Chief Sweeney. Gibson was sweeping everything before him. For the mayor or the chief to have detracted from Gibson's act by hinting that he should have informed the police and caused "Red Mike's" arrest without going through with the plot to the point of assisting in placing the derailler on the track would have been instantly resented as an embittered and ungrateful move—a cry of "sour grapes."

During the day John received his first praise from P. Q., who called him to his desk.

"Brennan tells me that if it had not been for you we wouldn't have been in on Gibson's little party last night," the city editor said. "I told you Gibson would be a man worth knowing.

You're coming along splendidly, Gallant. Just keep it up and practice writing. Read Brennan's stuff and study how he does it. I'll give you all the chance you want and there'll be a little more in your pay envelope this week."

John thanked him and hunted up Brennan.

"It was mighty kind of you to tell P. Q. that I've helped you," he said.

"Forget it," said Brennan.

"Your story had all the others beaten to death," he said, referring to what Brennan had written of the attempted train wreck.

"Forget that, too," said Brennan.

Later in the afternoon he heard from Consuello. He was considerably surprised when he recognized her voice.

"I do so want to thank you for what appeared in your paper about Mr. Gibson," she said. "He tells me that it was the best account of what occurred that appeared in any of the papers."

"I'm sorry," John confessed, "but it happens that I did not write a word of it."

"Really? I thought—he said you were there
——"

"I was, but you must remember I'm only a cub. I couldn't be trusted with a big story like that. It was written by our star man.

"Wasn't it wonderful?"

"You mean what Mr. Gibson did?"

"Yes," before he realized he added, "and I have an idea that to hear you say so means more to him than all that has been written."

"He has—been kind enough—to say—something like that."

Then she laughed.

"I suppose," she said, "he wouldn't care very much to have me tell you such things. You wouldn't believe me if I told you that what he said didn't please me, would you?"

"Well——"

"I won't insist that you answer that."

"You spoke of wishing to meet mother?" he ventured. "You were so kind Sunday—could you—would you—visit us at home? It's not much but—it's home, you know."

"I've been waiting for you to say that," she replied. "Make it whenever you wish. I do want to meet your mother."

"Sunday—for dinner?"

"Yes."

"At three."

"At three," she repeated.

Mrs. Gallant rejoiced with him that evening over the increase in salary P. Q. had promised him. She had learned of Consuello from the talks they had each evening, when John recounted to her the events of the day.

"I'll do my best to make things nice for her," Mrs. Gallant said when John spoke to her of

having invited Consuello for dinner Sunday.
"It is so good of her to wish to meet me."

"Mother," he said, taking her in his arms,
"no one can be a friend of mine who is not a
friend of yours."

"Not even Consuello?" she asked him, ban-
teringly.

CHAPTER VIII

ACCLAMATION of Gibson's frustration of the plot of "Red Mike" to wreck the "Lark" grew in volume the following day. The train wrecker hovered between life and death at the receiving hospital and, during his conscious periods, cursed the police commissioner incessantly. There was talk of Gibson as a recall candidate for mayor, but he met it with repeated declarations that he had no political ambitions.

During the morning, at P. Q.'s order, Brennan and John with reporters from the other papers, besieged the city hall seeking an interview with, or statement from, the mayor on Gibson's demand for Chief Sweeney's removal and the situation in general.

"Nothing to say at all, boys, nothing at all," the mayor said. "If I have anything for you I'll call you."

Regardless of this promise the reporters camped in the ante-room to the mayor's office, listing those who entered for conference with the city's chief executive officer and speculating on the outcome of the political war. It was John's first sight of the mayor and he considered him a rather mild little man, pleasant faced and of an attractive although somewhat

easy-going personality. The men with whom he conferred were his political advisers, most of them business men whose names were familiar to John as interested in civic enterprise.

While the other reporters were busily engaged in conversation John saw the mayor's secretary signal with a nod of his head for Brennan to step into another room. With a remark that he was going to the telephone Brennan slipped into the room and John saw the secretary whisper in his ear.

At one o'clock, an interval between editions, the other reporters went out for lunch. Brennan and John followed them into the corridor and John saw Brennan wink to him.

"See you later, boys," Brennan said, "got some stuff I have to get out."

When they were alone Brennan told John to follow him and they returned to the mayor's office. They were met in the ante-room by the secretary, who ushered them into the room where the mayor was leaning back in a big easy chair, his feet crossed and perched on his desk, and blowing thin clouds of smoke into the air from a slender cigar.

The secretary closed the door behind them and John heard the lock click shut. The mayor looked at them without changing his position.

"Who's your friend?" he asked, nodding to John.

"John Gallant, Mr. Mayor," Brennan said. "Gallant is helping me on this story. You can trust him as much as you trust me."

John shook hands with the mayor.

"As you say, Brennan," he said. "I suppose you have an idea why I sent for you."

Brennan nodded.

"Whatever we say here now isn't for publication, you understand," admonished the mayor.

"Perfectly."

The mayor puffed at his cigar and gazed up at the ceiling. For fully a minute nothing was said. Then he jerked his feet from the desk, sat upright in the chair and leaned forward.

"Brennan," he said, "am I a fool?"

John almost gasped in astonishment at the mayor's question. He was about to smile when he noticed that the faded blue eyes of the mild little man at the desk were glittering with anything but an amused light.

"I've never thought so," said Brennan.

"Well," said the mayor, leaning back in his chair again, "everyone I've talked with here today says I am and I was beginning to think they might be right."

"For appointing Gibson?" asked Brennan.

"No, for thinking what I can't help thinking about him," said the mayor, rising from his chair and beginning to pace back and forth

across the room, his hands thrust into his pockets, the cigar clenched between his teeth.

They waited for him to continue.

"Brennan," he said, stopping short in his striding, "you know what I think of you. You've helped me before and if I'm right this time you can help me again and land the biggest story you ever got in your life. If I'm wrong, then I am a fool and the sooner I get out of office the better it will be for me and the city."

He went back to his chair.

"Do you know what I've been thinking?" he asked.

"That Gibson isn't straight," said Brennan.

"Exactly," said the mayor. "And you can guess who I think is behind him."

"'Gink' Cummings," said Brennan.

"You're right again," the mayor thumped the desk with his fist. "It's the 'Gink,' as sure as I'm sitting here. That's what I told those who were here to see me today and everyone of them called me a fool. I may be, but I have a man-sized hunch that I'm not."

"Gink" Cummings, boss of the underworld, behind Gibson? Impossible. It was nothing but a weak attempt at retaliation, John thought. The mayor's advisers were right. He was a fool! Why did Brennan sit there and listen to such stuff?

"Now, get me right," continued the mayor. "I have nothing except a hunch that Gibson is backed by the 'Gink.' I haven't the slightest bit of real evidence to form a basis for my suspicion, but I believe I can see a pretty deep game in this."

"Go ahead, let's see if you figure it out the way I do," said Brennan.

"All right," said the mayor. "In the first place, the 'Gink' has been against me, trying to get me ever since I took office, you know that?"

Brennan nodded.

"He tried everything he could think of and I've beat him every time. He knows he can't stay in Los Angeles unless I'm out of office. So what's he to do? He gets a man like Gibson, starts this so-called clean-up campaign to get Gibson political power, stages or directs this 'Lark' wreck business and figures I'll quit so that Gibson can slip in here under the guise of a reformer, but really a figurehead, a puppet, to appease the churches and other organizations standing for a clean city and law enforcement while the 'Gink' bosses things from behind the scenes.

"It's been done before. It's an old trick and it works almost every time. Haven't you noticed that Gibson began his attack as soon as I appointed him commissioner and that he has never said a word about the 'Gink' whom he

knows just as well as I do is the city's worst enemy? This fellow Gibson is only a masquerader."

"That's the way I figured it might be," said Brennan, as the mayor paused, "but there is one obstacle. How did the 'Gink' ever get Gibson? How did Gibson, who seems to have plenty of money and a social position, ever fall into the 'Gink's' hands? What was his motive?"

The mayor smiled for the first time since they entered the room.

"Ah, Brennan, my boy, that's exactly what everyone asks me," he said. "But I haven't been asleep. When Gibson started all this business I got busy and I know a few things that help a lot. There seems to be plenty of reason for Gibson to be working for the 'Gink.'"

"How?" asked Brennan.

"Well," continued the mayor, "I'll only tell you what I know now. Gibson was highly recommended to me when I appointed him; you may be sure the 'Gink' was that careful. But I wasn't the only one who was tricked. There were others, the ones who recommended him.

"I've been digging into Gibson's past a little and I find that about three years ago, at the time I was elected, he was broke, flat broke. He had a social position through his family.

His father and mother, who are well known and well respected and who are dead, left him only a little. Three years ago he was in debt and then, suddenly, from some mysterious source, money began to flow into his hands. I don't know where it comes from, but he has it.

"He paid all he owed and began building up a reputation as a fine young fellow, so that he now has the esteem of men and women and organizations that count for much. His motive? Money!"

"That's a long shot, Mr. Mayor," said Brennan, "a long, long shot."

"I know it," said the mayor. "That's why I called you in here, today."

"That's all the information you have?" asked the reporter.

"That's all I have," the mayor said. "But it's been done before and it seems to me that Gibson isn't so smart that he could make the moves he has alone. You know the 'Gink.' You know how clever he is and how painstaking and patient he is in everything he does. What do you say?"

"It's a long shot, but it's worth it," Brennan said. "If you're going through with it you can begin by sitting tight, keeping Sweeney in office and working as hard as you can to get evidence that will break Gibson and the 'Gink'—if they are partners—once and for all."

The mayor rose from his chair and began his pacing back and forth again. He pushed out his short, thin legs to twice the length of his ordinary stride. He tossed the stub of his cigar over his shoulder and it fell at John's feet. He snapped his teeth on the end of a fresh cigar and thrust his hands into his pockets.

He crossed over to a window looking down on Broadway and his nervousness disappeared as he gazed into the throbbing thoroughfare below him. From where he was sitting John could see that the mayor had a fond look in his eyes as he watched the roaring traffic of the principal street of the great city that had honored him by electing him to its highest office.

Finally he turned and came slowly back to his desk. He stood erect beside it and John saw a look of determination come over the features he had considered so mild and pleasing.

"By God"—he used the name of the Creator softly, reverently, as if he were invoking aid from the Almighty—"Brennan, I'll do it."

* * * * *

Sunday morning John and his mother prepared for Consuello's visit to their modest little bungalow home. There was little that he could do to help, as Mrs. Gallant had arranged everything and spent most of the time in the kitchen preparing the dinner which he saw was to be

one of the repasts his father had so often termed a "feast fit for a king."

"My boy is truly a man now," she said to him. "Do you realize that this is the first time you have ever invited a girl to your home?"

He laughed as he took her in his arms to pet her.

"Mother, dearest," he said, "I know what you have been thinking, but you are wrong. Consuello is a wonderful girl and sometimes I cannot understand why she has been so kind to me. She is only a friend, dearest, and you mustn't think that your boy is in love with her or that she is in love with him."

Mrs. Gallant smiled up to him.

"You think a lot of her," she said.

"I do," he admitted. "She has been so very kind. She believes I am helping someone she seems really to care for."

"Yes, yes, I understand," Mrs. Gallant said. "You run along now and let me finish what I have to do."

In the living room he picked up the volume of "David Copperfield" he had been reading through for the first time since his father's death. Musing as he turned the pages he thought how thankful he was to his father for having made reading interesting to him. He remembered that the books his father had read to him and had given him to read, books that

crammed the small bookcase near the fireplace and filled every shelf and table in the room, were the very best—Dickens, Thackeray, Washington Irving, Shakespeare, Walter Scott, Addison, and of the later writers, Kipling, O. Henry, Anatole France, Mark Twain, Barrie.

"If I ever have a boy I will teach him to read as my father taught me," he said to himself.

Consuello arrived a few minutes before three. He saw through the window the machine in which they had ridden to her father's ranch the previous Sunday draw up to the curb outside. He watched her descend from the tonneau, speak to the chauffeur, who touched his cap, and turn toward the walk leading to the house. She wore the same dainty white dress she wore each time he had seen her and a white, summery, wide-brimmed hat.

He went out to meet her.

"You see," she said, "I'm not one of those who believe in being fashionably late. What a pretty little place you have."

His mother met them at the door. She had doffed her kitchen apron and her face was slightly flushed—from the heat of the range, he knew—as she smiled at Consuello with an extended hand.

"Miss Carrillo, my mother," John said.

"I'm happy to meet you, Miss Carrillo,"

Mrs. Gallant said. "John has spoken so often to me of you that I really feel I know you."

"I have been so anxious to meet you—to know you," Consuello said. "I, too, feel I know you because he has told me so much about you. I only wish I had been thoughtful enough to have had you with us last Sunday. The next time you must be with us."

Consuello was unaffected, John thought, in her praise of his mother's dinner. She insisted upon aiding in the removal of plates from the table and for the most part her conversation was with Mrs. Gallant. What delicious salad, she must have the dressing recipe if Mrs. Gallant would be so kind as to give it to her. She told in details that were meaningless to John of the Spanish dishes her mother prepared, of the barbecue feasts of the old days she remembered as a child.

He could see that his mother was interested, pleased, and he was relieved that Consuello alleviated the awkwardness imposed by the absence of someone to wait upon them. He left the table once to answer a ring at the door and found Mrs. Sprockett's husband there, coatless and collarless as usual.

"Is Maude here?" asked Mrs. Sprockett's husband, trying to appear as though he was not peering past John, which he was.

John was certain that Mrs. Sprockett's husband knew as well as he did that Mrs. Sprockett was not with them. He had more than a suspicion that Mr. Sprockett, having seen the automobile bring Consuello, had crossed the street out of pure curiosity.

"No," he said, shortly, an impulse rising in him to add, "and you know it."

"I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Sprockett's husband, humbly. "She didn't say, you know—I thought she might have—the baby——"

As on the night of his father's death John heard the Sprockett infant, who, he had a vague idea, was the eleventh or twelfth, wailing somewhere in the Sprockett home.

"No trouble," he said, shutting the door in the other's face.

They had been in the living room an hour after dinner when Mrs. Gallant rose.

"You must excuse me, Miss Carrillo," she said. "There is a neighborly duty I must attend to. Please remain until I return; it won't be long."

John was rather disappointed that his mother should leave them, but he understood how she was constantly being required for one reason or another by the neighbors. Alone, their conversation took another course.

"And as things are now, after he has demonstrated his courage in a way that leaves no

doubt, are there still those who are horrid enough to doubt Mr. Gibson?" she asked.

He was bound by the confidence he had entered into with Brennan not to reveal any part of the mayor's view of Gibson and his suspicion that the commissioner was the tool of "Gink" Cummings. The mayor, however, had publicly taken his stand of "sitting tight," as Brennan had suggested, and had flatly refused to oust Chief Sweeney.

"Yes," he answered. "Their doubt seems to have been made even stronger by what he did in preventing the wreck of the 'Lark.' "

Her eyes opened in astonishment.

"How?" she asked. "How can they possibly doubt him now?"

He explained to her Brennan's view that Gibson's frustration of "Red Mike's" plot was a "grandstand play," without mentioning Brennan. She sat silent for several minutes after he had concluded. Then, raising her head and looking directly at him, she said:

"Because we are friends I will tell you why I know so certainly that what you say cannot be true. Mr. Gibson and I have known each other since our school days. His father and mother were near and dear to my father and mother. He has been almost like a brother to me.

"I believe I know him for what he is, a

gentleman. I don't think there is anything of his plans in this crusade that he has not told me. He is kind enough to feel that I have his interest at heart, that I want him to succeed, for his own sake, for the sake of his family and his name.

"He has no other motive in all this but to do what he has pledged himself to do—make Los Angeles a better place to live in. He is purely an altruist. When he has accomplished what he has set out to do he will retire from public life altogether with the satisfaction of knowing he has stood for law and order and decency, that he has done something for the city in which he lives and which he loves. That will be his only reward, the satisfaction he feels within himself."

She paused, her eyes downcast.

"There is one other reward—that is, he says it will be a reward—that he tells me he will claim if he is successful," she said, softly.

He knew what she meant and he wondered if she would say it.

"There is a girl he loves and who believes she loves him," she said.

So, perhaps, Brennan had guessed it when he speculated, "Sometimes it's a girl."

"The girl, has she—the reward, has it been promised him?" he asked.

He saw the tinge of crimson steal into her cheeks.

"She—it has," she answered, softly.

"I understand now," he said. "I know now why he faced death the way he did. What man would not?"

This last he spoke quietly, as if to himself.

"Can you think of him as insincere, as faithless, as selfish, as greedy for power?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"I've told you things that are sacred," she said. "I have told you because I regard you as a friend. I liked you from the moment we met——"

"And I said you were beautiful?" he interrupted.

She smiled back to him.

"And you said I was beautiful," she repeated. "But not simply because you said it, but because I thought you meant it."

"I often wonder how I had courage to say that to you and to tell you I dreamed of meeting you again," he said. "I have often wondered why you have been so kind, why you are interested in me at all. At first I thought it was only—only what you might call pity and I resented it."

"Why is it we have such thoughts?" she said. "Why must we always impute a misconceived motive?"

"Because deceit has its place in the human heart, I suppose," he said, and, strangely, he thought of the mayor's regard of Gibson as a figurehead of hypocritical virtue who sold himself for money. How terrible it would be if that were true!

As if by mutual unspoken assent they talked of other things, of books, of plays, of life, until Mrs. Gallant returned, apologizing again for her absence. A few minutes later the automobile which had brought Consuello glided up to a halt in front of the house and, glancing at her wrist watch, she arose.

"I must be going," she said. "It's my turn now to thank you for a wonderful day, Mrs. Gallant; you will promise to meet father and mother, won't you?"

"I would be delighted," Mrs. Gallant said.

They escorted her to the waiting automobile. John imagined he saw Mrs. Sprockett and her husband peering out of the window of the Sprockett house across the street.

CHAPTER IX

THE trust that Consuello reposed in him when she told him of her promise to marry Gibson, John held inviolable to the extent that he did not mention it to his mother. It strengthened his belief that Brennan and the mayor were in error in their suspicion that Gibson was linked with the notorious "Gink" Cummings and that his clean-up crusade was only aimed to overthrow the administration and make the "Gink" the boss of the city.

Had he been free to tell the mayor and Brennan that Gibson was striving to accomplish his crusade with the principal motive of winning the girl he loved, John felt that the suspicion against the police commissioner would be undermined. He could not bring himself to believe that Brennan would deliberately lend himself to the mayor's plan to attack Gibson unless he actually believed that there was some reason to suspect the commissioner.

There were but few developments in the feud between Gibson and the mayor during the week after Consuello's visit to the Gallant home. Sentiment throughout the city was obviously in favor of Gibson, whose sensational capture of "Red Mike," averting, as it did, the wreck of

the "Lark," gave him a strong hold upon the public. The mayor's refusal to remove Chief Sweeney, putting him on record as opposing the commissioner, was generally considered the last defiant move of a man cornered and doomed to defeat.

Later in the week John was upset by the first dissension that had ever arisen between him and his mother. They were on the porch of their home in the evening when John recalled that he had overlooked asking Mrs. Gallant her opinion of Consuello. As this recollection came into his mind, it also occurred to him that his mother had never volunteered to say anything of Consuello after her visit to their home the previous Sunday.

"Mother, dear," he said, "tell me, did you like Miss Carrillo?"

He felt that the question was almost unnecessary and asked it casually. He was surprised when she hesitated before answering. Looking up to her, he saw a hint of worry in her expression.

"She seemed a pleasant girl," she said slowly.

"Seemed?" he repeated, incredulously. "Why, mother, you speak as if you did not like her."

"I'm sure I would like her if I understood," she said, her eyes upon her needle and crochet work.

"Understood?" he gasped. "Understood what?"

"My dear boy, please do not become irritated by what I say," she said, lifting her head to look at him. "You know I would not hurt you for anything in the world."

"I know, mother, but I cannot imagine——"

"I know you can't," she said interrupting him. "If you had you would have explained it all to me days ago. Come, don't let us quarrel. I may be foolish to have thought what I have, but you must remember, my boy, that I am a mother and—a woman."

"What under the sun has come into your head to talk like this, mother?" he asked.

She placed her needlework in her lap and reached over to stroke his head.

"Don't be cross with your mother, John," she said. "I'm sure it's all a misunderstanding, something you can clear away with a few words, and when you do please do not ever hold it against me for having had such thoughts."

"You know, John, things have changed greatly since I was a girl, but I cannot help myself from having the viewpoint of other days."

"What is it, mother? Tell me, what is it?" he asked, somewhat impatiently.

"You won't be cross and hate me?"

"No."

"Then I'll tell you. My boy, I cannot un-

derstand why Miss Carrillo lives in the city alone and away from her parents."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Mother, surely you don't——" he began.

It was incomprehensible, unbelievable. If she had spoken against the name of his dead father John could not have been more startled than by this questioning in his mother's mind of Consuello.

"I don't think anything," she said, again stroking his head. "But, between you and me, John, there should be not even the slightest misunderstanding. That's why I have spoken to you like this. Probably, if she has not told you, you never thought to ask yourself that question. Perhaps I should not ask it, even to myself, but I am a mother and a woman and it's natural for us to doubt when it concerns one we love."

"You have no right to misjudge," he said.

"I don't misjudge, my boy; I only wait for your answer."

It flashed into his mind that he could not answer, could not tell her why Consuello lived in the city, but it did not cause him to waver. Consuello's words, "Why must we always impute a misconceived motive?" the question she had asked when they had discussed those who doubted Gibson's sincerity, and his answer, "Because deceit has its place in the human heart, I

suppose," came back to him. He could not, however, imagine deceit in his mother's heart, and he knew that the seed of suspicion in her mind had been cultivated into an ugly weed of doubt by some one else. This thought calmed the indignation which was surging through him.

"Mother," he said, "I do not know why she lives alone in the city. She has never told me and I have never asked. I did not consider it my business. Not for a moment has a shadow of doubt entered my head. Can't you see—can't you tell by looking at her?"

"She may be with friends. She may be studying. She may be working. Whatever she is doing, you nor I have no reason to let an evil thought about her stay with us for a moment."

For several minutes they said nothing. Then Mrs. Gallant broke the silence.

"Tell me," she said, "was that Miss Carrillo's automobile that brought her here, Sunday?"

"Oh, mother!" he exclaimed, exasperated.

"I'm sorry, John. I only thought you might tell me."

"I don't know and I don't care," he said, coming to his feet. "Mother, this is all foolishness—rank foolishness. Here you and I sit quarreling over things that are none of our business. I never thought it of you. I never

thought you could think such things, let alone breathe a word about them. I never——”

“John, John,” said Mrs. Gallant, pleadingly, “don’t, don’t!”

“I can’t believe it’s you,” he said, angrily. “Some one has been putting these infernal thoughts into your head—some gossiping, scandal-loving, evil-thinking——”

“My boy!”

He stopped and the anger that had surged so swiftly slowly left him—left him ashamed that he had given way to his temper, ashamed that he had spoken so sharply to the one he loved more than any one in the world, and who, he knew, loved him as no one else would ever love him.

Her head was bowed in her hand, her arm resting on the side of her chair. He went to her and dropped on his knees at her feet.

“Mother, dearest,” he said, softly, “please, please don’t cry. I was a brute. I shouldn’t have spoken to you the way I did, but I was angry. Please, no misunderstanding must come between us. You are everything in the world to me, mother, and I trust you, believe in you.”

“I only wanted to know—for your sake,” she said.

“I know, mother, I know. That is what you have always done—thought of me first. But,

don't you see, mother, she is nothing more than a friend to me. And she has been kind, so very kind and good, and I know she is only the sweet, dear girl I believe her to be. If you had only been with us when we went to her home, mother. If you only knew her as I know her, and you're going to. You're going to know her and like her."

"Yes, yes, my boy. I know I will. But, John, there is so much evil in this world, so much that we cannot understand, so many disappointments, so many cruel things, so much wickedness, and I only think of you, my boy—only of you. I could not bear to have you care for some one and then be——"

"I know, mother, dearest, I know," he said, petting her hands. "Now, we'll forget all about it, won't we? You'll not let doubt come into your mind again, will you? Don't be over-cautious in your care over me, mother. And don't think I'm in love. I do think she is sweet and kind and beautiful, and I thought you would like her because she is—is—is what I would call an 'old-fashioned' girl."

"Old-fashioned girls are scarce these days," said Mrs. Gallant. "I do so hope she is all that you believe her to be."

"And I am forgiven for the things I said in haste, tonight?" he asked.

She kissed his forehead.

"And you'll forgive your foolish old mother who loves her boy so?"

She rose and moved toward the door.

"You'll be coming in soon?" she asked.

"In a little while, mother," he said. "It's such a wonderful evening I'm going to enjoy it for a few minutes more."

Alone, John speculated on Consuello's reason for living in Los Angeles while her parents remained at home on the ranch. The probability that she worked in the city became stronger in his mind when he thought of how her father had spoken to him of their reduced circumstances, the fact that but little remained of the vast estate once owned by the Carrillo family. He was reasonably certain that the automobile which Consuello told him was placed at her disposal by a "friend" was owned by Gibson, and that the long friendship between the two families, combined with privilege permitted by their engagement to be married, made it possible for her to accept such accommodation.

How unlike his mother it had been for her to question Consuello's mode of living! He excused her suspicion for two reasons—first, that the doubt had been put into her mind by some one else and, second, because her great love for him had carried her too far.

The mockingbird that had warbled on the

night of his father's death began its song in a tree near by. As he listened, meditative, he saw Mrs. Sprockett glide across the street to the Sprockett house, returning from one of her unceasing visits to other homes than her own.

His instinctive dislike for Mrs. Sprockett caused him to blame her for creating suspicion against Consuello in his mother's mind.

* * * * *

During the following week John learned the answer to his mother's question of why Consuello lived in Los Angeles, away from her parents, the inquiry that had provoked him to anger because he took it as an insinuation against Consuello's character.

Consuello called him one morning by telephone.

"Have you an hour or so to spare, today?" she asked.

"It all depends——" he began.

"I know you are a busy man," she said, "but I thought you would like to see something interesting. It's a surprise I have been saving for you."

He had a premonition that she was about to give him the answer to his mother's question.

"What is it?" he asked. She laughed before she replied:

"Oh, it would spoil it all to tell you now. Didn't you hear me say it was a surprise? I

want you to come out to an address I will give you if you say you are able to get away from your office."

"When?"

"This afternoon, as close to two o'clock as you can make it."

"May I call you in a few minutes and give you my answer?" he asked. "You see, I must have the permission of my city editor if I leave the office except on newspaper business."

"I'll wait for your answer," she said.

P. Q. gruffly gave him permission to go off duty at one o'clock. He hurried back to the telephone and told her that he would be able to see her. She gave him an address in Hollywood.

"You will be stopped at the door," she told him, "but tell whoever stops you that you are the gentleman I am expecting and there won't be any further difficulty. I'll look for you at two, then."

When he reached the address she gave him, shortly before two o'clock, John's first feeling was that he had misunderstood the directions she had given him. Before him, inclosed by a high fence over the horizon of which he could see the tops of queer structures, stood the rambling studio of the Peerless Pictures, Inc., one of the largest motion picture producing concerns in the capital of filmdom. At one side of

a large open gateway, near an oddly shaped sentry box, was a fat, red-faced man tilted back in a kitchen chair.

The man was eyeing him as he approached the gateway.

"Hey, just a minute, son, where do you think you're going?" the man shouted, turning his head to glare at the intruder.

"Inside," John said.

"Well, you don't say—Hey, there, just a minute!" this last as John, who had a secret delight in baiting officiousness, continued toward the gateway.

"Who do you think you want to see in there?" demanded the guard.

"I don't THINK I want to see anyone; Miss Carrillo sent for me," said John, wondering if this would be the password and feeling a thrill go up his backbone at the thought he might be at the wrong place.

"What's your name?"

"Gallant—John Gallant."

"Why didn't you say so in the first place? What do you think I am, a mind reader? The clairvoyants are all east of Main street, son, all east of Main street. Keep right on going, you'll find her on stage number three."

His heels crunched into the finely-graveled driveway as he walked in the direction pointed out to him by the guard, who condescended to

leave his chair for the purpose of guiding him. He passed two huge barn-like structures and found the third designated in large white letters, "Stage No. 3." A superstructure of black cloth and laths was built out from the doorway at right angles to the stage building, a precaution, he later learned, against daylight.

It was his first visit to a motion picture studio. He had no interest in pictures or the people who played in them. His father, from whom he inherited his love for books and the better class of spoken drama, had always regarded motion pictures as almost a profanation of art. Once he had noticed an advertising poster of a well known star referred to as a "man's man," wearing a shirt open at the neck, sleeves rolled to the elbows, riding trousers and shiny leather puttees, endeavoring desperately to appear like a combination of Sandow and a Northwest Mounted Police officer. He had had the satisfaction of hurling a rock to mar the "virile" face as it looked down defiantly at him from the billboard.

He had always imagined that all motion picture scenes were photographed in the open, on roofless stages, and the idea that Southern California's perpetual sunlight gave the best service for this purpose he believed to be the reason that Los Angeles was the principal producing point of the world. It surprised him

when he realized that the barn-like structures were inclosed stages.

Was Consuello a screen player or had she some other work connected with the production of pictures, designer, scenario writer, director, art expert? Or was she only at the studio as a visitor, inviting him to be with her because some particular star was playing or some especially interesting scene being staged?

Entering the cloth and lath superstructure he found himself in pitch darkness. Unable to see his hand before his face he stopped to accustom his eyes to the absence of any light. A voice spoke out of the dark:

"Do you wish to see anyone?" it asked.

"Miss Carrillo," he answered, having an uncanny feeling as he spoke to someone he could not see and yet whom he knew was close at hand.

"Miss Carrillo is on the set—was she expecting you?" the voice asked.

"She told me to be here and to mention that she was expecting me," he said.

"This way, then, please."

He turned in the direction from which the voice came and walked slowly, cautiously, until his feet encountered steps. He mounted the steps with a strange feeling that he was about to fall on his face.

Reaching the top step he felt himself on a

level floor. Shafts of light, escaping from between tall objects before him, invaded the darkness. A stringed orchestra was playing something soft, plaintively sweet. He recognized the music as Schubert's "Serenade." He stumbled over a sawhorse and his guide turned upon him with a quick admonition to be more careful. Except for the music there was not a sound.

Turning past one of the tall dark objects, which he afterward discovered were painted canvas scenery, he halted at a signal from the man who was leading him and who continued to go forward on tiptoes, a muffled curse escaping him as a board squeaked under foot. John named his guide "Mr. John J. Silence" in his mind.

Before him two arc lamps threw a bluish white light on a set representing the interior of a finely furnished room. Between the lamps were two cameras which were being cranked by two tall young men in khaki trousers and leather puttees who wore the peaks of their caps turned backward like children playing "fire-man." Near the cameras a man with horn-rim spectacles sat in a canvas chair, a manuscript in his hand. Scattered about were a dozen men and women, poised tensely, as if they were afraid to move a muscle. To the left was the orchestra, a violin, 'cello and

bass viol. Why, thought John, do bass viol players always have that far-away, woebegone look on their faces as they saw at their instruments?

From where he stood it was impossible for John to see what was before the cameras. He strained his eyes in a vain attempt to identify Consuello as among those standing behind the lamps. He saw his guide speak to one of the figures—a man—and then turn to signal to him violently and silently to approach, pressing his forefinger to his lips as a final admonition to be quiet.

"Mr. John J. Silence bids me approach," John said to himself.

He tiptoed forward. A board creaked under his foot. It could not have had more effect if it had been a pistol shot. Instantly all except the cameramen turned on him quickly. He imagined little arrows darting at him from their eyes, those little arrows cartoonists use to illustrate a fixed stare by one of their subjects. Never had he seen such a look of mingled pain and exasperation as crossed the face of "John J. Silence." He stood stock-still, fearful that if he made another sound they would pounce upon him and tear him limb from limb while "John J. Silence," completely overcome, writhed in agony on the floor.

By carefully testing the flooring each time

before he put his full weight on his foot, he managed to reach a point behind the cameras without having that battery of aggravated eyes turned upon him again. Now no one favored him even with a turn of the head. He saw that Consuello was not in the group. The man in the canvas chair spoke, softly, appealingly.

"Now, Miss Carrillo, you think of how happy you two were together—days that are never to be again—he's gone—gone forever—that's it—tears come up in your eyes—he's (deep voice) gone, (deeper voice) gone, (very deep) g-o-n-e."

Risking those reprimanding eyes again, John stepped to one side to enable himself to see around the man who was in front of him, blocking his view of the set.

He saw Consuello, a strange, sad Consuello, her face ghastly pale under the bluish white light, her naturally beautiful features hidden under a mask of paint and powder, but Consuello, just the same. Heavy tears that brimmed from her eyelids coursed down her cheek, sparkling in the glare of the lamps. Her thickly rouged lips trembled; the fingers of one of her hands, pressed tightly in her lap, beat wildly on the back of the other beneath it.

She was seated in a large plush chair facing the cameras. She wore an evening gown and

her hair was arranged in a high coiffure that made her look taller, older.

"Cut!" commanded the man in the horn-rim glasses. "That was splendid, Miss Carrillo, splendid."

The cameras stopped grinding. Consuello rose—laughing. The orchestra stopped abruptly. She came toward them, touching lightly at her cheeks with a tiny handkerchief.

"It seems a shame to dry such perfectly real tears," she said.

Then she saw John and came to him, her hand outstretched. As if they were controlled by a single mind and impulse the heads of everyone in the group turned to him.

"I'm so glad you got here," she said.

CHAPTER X

SO THAT was your surprise for me," he said, taking her hand.

She smiled, a strange and, to him, an unnatural smile, made so by the rouged lips and painted face. Had it not been for the sound of her voice he would have doubted if the girl before him, still holding his hand while the others scrutinized him, was Consuello.

"Speak, or I won't know it's you," he said.

"Were you really surprised?" she asked.

"Beyond words," he assured her.

She turned to the man with the horn-rim spectacles.

"That is all?" she inquired.

"All for today, Miss Carrillo, thank you," she was answered. "Tomorrow at 2, same costume, but on the other set."

"Come," she said, turning to John. "We'll have tea and a talk as soon as I return to—normalcy—that was Mr. Harding's way of expressing it, wasn't it?"

She led the way across the floor, along a twisting and turning path, through furniture, furnishings and an accumulation of "props" to the door. As they stepped out into the daylight again her face was more unlike the face

of the Consuello John knew than it had been in the half gloom inside.

They crossed a narrow asphalt-paved road to a long two-story building.

"I won't be long," she said, opening the door to the section in which her dressing room was located. "When I'm ready the maid will call you. Will you wait here?"

"Don't hurry," he said. "I'll be right here where you left me."

While he was waiting "John J. Silence" emerged from the door of the stage building. John frowned, pressed his forefinger to his lips in the signal for silence that he had received inside. "John J. Silence," grinning, tiptoed away with ludicrous gestures.

In twenty minutes the maid called John to the door, holding it open for him as he entered.

"This way, please," she said, taking the lead.

A dozen steps brought them to a door marked with Consuello's name. John paused at the threshold while the maid entered, returning in a moment to hold the door open for him again. As he stepped inside she went out into the corridor, closing the door after her.

John found himself in a tiny room with brightly designed wallpaper, matted rugs, a wicker chaise longue, wicker glass-topped table, wicker tea wagon and wicker chairs, all dec-

orated in a gay colored chintz. The heavy curtains at one side of the room parted, and Consuello—the real Consuello again—stood before him attired in a tailored suit gorgeous in its simplicity, setting off a dainty real biche lace and batiste blouse.

"Well?" she said, as if she had been waiting for him to speak.

"I'll say it again—you're beautiful," he said.

The same half credulous look that she had given him when he told her she was beautiful that day they met for the first time at the Barton Randolph lawn fete came into her eyes.

"I did not mean to ask you that," she said.

"I know," he returned, "but you are, and I couldn't help saying so."

She took a chair near the tea-table and he seated himself in the chair that was opposite to her.

"I meant, what do you think of me now?" she explained, pouring the tea into absurdly small cups, one of which she handed to him.

"It was a surprise," he said. "I'll confess to you now that you puzzled me. I could not understand why you were—well, exiled in the city during the week. I imagined you were either with friends as a sort of a permanent guest or studying."

"You never thought of me as working?" she asked.

"Yes," he admitted, "I have, but I could not picture you in any employment I could think of. It was impossible to think of you as a stenographer or a school teacher or a nurse or a shop girl."

"All because you met me at a lawn fete—a society affair," she concluded.

"No. All because—well, all because you are you."

Was that a glint of pleasure he saw for the briefest fraction of a second in her eyes?

"I asked you to come out here this afternoon because I knew that you would find it out some day, probably tomorrow or the next day, or next week, and I wanted you to know that I had not tried to keep it from you," she said. "I want you to know, too, from me, why it is I'm here."

She paused and he waited for her to continue.

"I entered picture work because—well, frankly, we—that is, father, mother and I—are alone in the world and poor," she said. "Really, honestly poor. The last that we could afford to spend from the little we have left was spent on my education. Father insisted.

"Once, and it was not so many years ago, our family was wealthy like other California families that received land grants. But father—the dear that he is—like so many of his friends, thought little of business or the future and

slowly our land was sold until now only a few acres of what we once had remain—only the few acres of the home you visited.

"Of course, I was fortunate. My family name gave me entrance anywhere and still does, although there are those who think I have desecrated that name and who feel that because we are in reduced circumstances we have simply ceased to be.

"So when I was old enough to realize exactly what conditions were and what we faced I was determined to do something. It was a friend who was kind enough to believe and tell me that I had talent for acting who first interested me in motion picture work. And, not to tire you with long, boresome details, I was lucky. Somehow it was not difficult and I am now receiving enough to keep us comfortable without encroaching, as I said, on what little father has left.

"There, you have my story," she concluded, settling back in her chair.

"And the work, do you like it?" he asked.

"I do like it," she replied. "And, besides, what else could I do? You have said yourself that I could never be a stenographer, a school teacher or a nurse or a shop girl."

"You could be anything," he hastened to explain, "from a shop girl to a—to a—a queen."

"That's better," she concurred, smiling.

"Those tears you shed back there before the camera, who were they for?"

"For the man I loved—in the story," she explained. "I was 'emoting'—as they call it—over his death. The inspiration was provided by the orchestra you heard playing. My director thinks it's wonderful that I can shed tears whenever he asks me to. He says it's a relief not to have to substitute drops of glycerine or hold a raw onion under his leading woman's nose to bring about the required lachrymal effect. To be able to cry easily before the camera, he says, is the supreme test, because to shed real tears you must have imagination and imagination is everything."

"And how do you do it?"

"There are plenty of causes for tears in life, far too many, don't you think?" she said. "When my director calls for tears I simply think of one of the many—pictures I have seen of starving children, an empty stocking at Christmas time, a homeless kitten, an orphan baby."

"Don't you ever think of the story and cry because you are carried away by the imaginative sorrow of the death of the man you love?"

"No," she said, laughing. "How can I? Most of the time I'm really glad—not in the story, of course—that he's out of the picture."

The publicity man always refers to me as a star of the emotional type and writes yards upon yards of stuff about how I actually 'live' the part I am playing. My imagination doesn't carry me that far, though, and if imagination is everything, as my director says, the publicity man should be the greatest actor living."

"I don't pay much attention to pictures, but I can't remember ever having seen your name or photograph in the advertisements," he said.

"Have you ever noticed the name of Jean Hope?"

"Often."

"That is the name I took when I had advanced far enough to be featured. It was suggested to me by the publicity man, who insisted upon it being short and snappy, as he said, something that would be easy to remember and easy to put into type. Of course, I am not obscured to my friends, who all know that I am Jean Hope. Only once have I had to be positively firm with the publicity man and that was when he wanted to make me the subject of a newspaper story that society girls, as he called them, were intent upon becoming motion picture actresses. That, for the sake of my friends, I simply had to refuse."

"I think," he said slowly, "that the name your father calls you is the prettiest of them all."

"Mi Primavera?"

"Yes, does anyone else call you that?"

"Only father," she said. "That is his pet name for me—'My Springtime.'"

"You know," he said, "the story you told me of the naming of Spring street; how Ord, the surveyor, named it for his sweetheart, whom he called 'Mi Primavera,' is incomplete. Tell me, if you know, did he eventually marry the beautiful Senorita Trinidad de la Guerra?"

"I have often wondered that, myself," she said. "Whether they were married or not—what a gallant, romantic thing it was for him to do."

"And how few know the story!" he added.

"What dreams he must have had for the upbuilding of that street he named for the one he loved," she said. "I imagine he little thought it was to become a business street, that he thought of it always as lined with quaintly beautiful Spanish homes, shaded and quiet, with couples strolling along it at twilight and rest and contentment everywhere."

"That was his dream," he agreed. "The dream of a practical man—a surveyor and a soldier."

"And after all," she said, "is it as you said once that it is only in books and plays that dreams come true?"

Her chin resting in her hand, she gazed out

the small chintz bordered window of the room, preoccupied. He noticed the daintiness of her profile, the placid sweetness of her face in repose.

The silence was broken by a rap on the door that startled him.

"Come in," she called.

The door opened and on the threshold stood Gibson, the smile he had meant for her fading from his face.

For a moment he paused, his hand still on the knob of the door, as if he hesitated to disturb them. Then, with the appearance of putting whatever thoughts he might have had from his mind, he strode in.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "This is a surprise. How are you, Gallant? Haven't seen you since the night we had our little engagement with 'Red Mike,' who, I have just been told, will recover."

"I'm so glad to hear that," said Consuello.

"And so was I," Gibson said. "No, no, Gallant, stay where you are. I'll sit here."

John had risen to offer Gibson the chair opposite Consuello. He sought a way of relieving the embarrassment he for one, felt when Gibson made his unexpected entrance.

"Miss Carrillo has revealed herself to me as Jean Hope," he explained. "Until this

afternoon I had no idea she played in pictures."

Was it because she too, felt it necessary to make some explanation that she said:

"You see, I realized that Mr. Gallant would eventually learn about it and I wanted to surprise him myself."

"I'm proud of my Consuello," Gibson said, patting her hand and speaking to John. "She is famous—really, truly famous—far more, I'm afraid than you or I will ever be, Gallant. Still, she deserves it, and we don't—that is, I don't, at least. She is so famous that I find it difficult to keep myself from becoming jealous of her."

"Jealous of my good luck?" she asked, smiling.

"No, no; jealous of the admiration that is showered upon you and those who give it. You can understand why, can't you, Gallant?"

While Gibson seemed absolutely frank and to have put the question only incidentally, John had a feeling that it was something more than a mere interrogation. He scanned Gibson's face for a trace of a betrayal of his purpose in putting the question to him.

"Easily," he replied.

"You are both more than kind to me," Consuello said. "Come, now that we three are

together, let's talk of what you're doing, Reggie. It's far more interesting. I'll call for a fresh pot of tea."

She pressed a button in the wall and a maid responded.

"There's little more that is new," Gibson said. "The mayor is still standing pat, although I have reason to believe that he is feeling the pressure brought on him by those that are supporting me, because he refuses to remove Chief Sweeney. Most of the men who are his advisers are dropping away from him. His policy in the face of my attack apparently dissatisfies them. I am waiting for one of them to swing over to my side and tell exactly what his position is."

John remembered the interview Brennan and he had had with the mayor, and in his mind, as vivid as it was when it occurred, he saw the mayor solemnly pledge himself to seek to establish what he suspected—that Gibson was in league with "Gink" Cummings.

"What will be your next move?" he asked.

"I have promised to clean up Los Angeles and I mean to go through with it," Gibson replied. "With the mayor taking the position he has, it's plainly up to me to carry on despite his opposition. I'll go ahead with my plans to drive gamblers, crooks, bandits and

women of the underworld from the city and in doing so the people will be convinced that I am in the right and blame the mayor for his obstinacy in refusing to work with me.

"The big difficulty will be to get men to assist me. I have the private detectives I have employed, but I doubt if I can use them in making raids. Of course, Sweeney will see that I don't get any police officers to carry out my orders, which leaves only the district attorney and the sheriff from whom I can ask assistance. I have been informed that the sheriff is ready and willing to place a number of his deputies at my command and they will probably be the officers who will carry out my orders.

"The fact that I am compelled to use deputy sheriffs, who are county and not city employes, in my crusade will have its effect, demonstrating conclusively that the mayor does not intend to assist me in any way in doing what is his duty to keep Los Angeles clean."

"Surely, you're not going to take your life in your hands again?" asked Consuello. John perceived that she was sincerely concerned for Gibson's safety.

"My dear Conny," he said patting her shoulder, "the danger will be slight. I can't expect to have things done and only sit back in my office letting others do it."

"But promise me that you will not take any needless chances," she pleaded.

"You have my promise," he said. Then, turning to John, he added: "You see, Gallant, how it is. If I ever turn and run away from danger, you will know I am only keeping a promise."

"I don't believe there is any one who questions your courage," John said.

"It's good of you to say that, Gallant," Gibson acknowledged. "Now, suppose we hear what you have to say. Tell us, what are you newspaper men saying about this rumpus between the mayor and me? What do you think of what I'm doing? Have you any suggestions?"

John hesitated before answering. What he had heard the mayor say to Brennan was confidential. Even had he been at liberty to tell it he doubted if he would have disclosed it, for Consuello's sake.

"There is one thing upon which the reporters are speculating," he said.

"What's that?" asked Gibson.

"They are wondering when you will launch your attack in a new direction."

"How?"

"By hitting at 'Gink' Cummings." As John mentioned the "Gink's" name he watched Gibson's face closely to discover the effect it

had upon the commissioner. He thought afterward that Gibson had expected him to refer to Cummings and that he had been, if anything, a trifle too well prepared to answer.

"I thought so," Gibson said. "Well, let me tell you something, Gallant. I'll make things hot for the 'Gink' mighty soon. But, you must remember, the 'Gink' is only the effect and not the cause of the trouble. The cause is the failure of the mayor and Sweeney to keep the lid down in Los Angeles. Cummings is only powerful through the weakness of the mayor and the chief. If they were on the job, Los Angeles wouldn't be big enough for such a man as 'Gink' Cummings."

"Why don't you come out and say so?" John asked, feeling reassured, however, by Gibson's announcement that the "Gink" was not to be overlooked.

"It's another case of where 'actions speak louder than words,'" the police commissioner said. "Cummings isn't afraid of what someone says is going to happen to him. He's a veteran. He's heard that kind of talk before. So have the people of Los Angeles. What he is afraid of and what the people of the city want is—action."

"And who is this man, 'Gink' Cummings?" put in Consuello, who had been listening intently to the conversation between the two men.

"'Gink' Cummings, my dear," said Gibson, "is the boss of the element I hope to drive out of Los Angeles. He rules like a king over burglars, gamblers, pickpockets, bandits, swindlers and crooks of every description."

John took advantage of an opportunity.

"It's true, is it not, that the mayor and Cummings are enemies?"

"Yes, that's true, but they're political enemies," Gibson said. "The trouble is, however, that the mayor is afraid of Cummings. And so is Sweeney. They don't seem to have the courage to go after him."

"Why don't they take this 'Gink' person and put him in the penitentiary?" asked Consuello.

Gibson laughed.

"That appears to be an impossibility," he said. "They have tried it time and again, but each time he was too clever for them."

"Of course," smiled Consuello. "It was silly of me to have asked such a question. I confess I'm a perfect ignoramus about such things."

A few minutes later they left the studio, Gibson offering to convey John to his home in his automobile.

"As often as I can I call for Consuello and take her to her home," he explained. "We are both so busy these days we have little other time in which to see each other. I'm

glad I saw you this afternoon, Gallant, and you may want to know that it won't be long before I'll have some more real news for you."

As the automobile carried them toward his home, John thanked Consuello again for having invited him to the studio.

"I don't believe I would have discovered that you are Jean Hope for a long time," he said. "From now on I'll never miss one of your pictures."

"I have yet to view with complacency the scenes in which she is in the arms of another man," laughed Gibson.

After dinner that night he led his mother to the porch, telling her he had news for her. He was glad that he was able to answer her questions concerning Consuello, although he believed the unpleasant occurrence of a few nights before was completely a thing of the past, to be forgotten.

"Mother," he said, smiling, "I discovered today what keeps Miss Carrillo in the city during the week."

Mrs. Gallant regarded him expectantly.

"You did?"

"Yes, she is working."

Mrs. Gallant smiled, as though the information given her by her son relieved a hidden anxiety.

"And what does she do?" she asked.

"She is in pictures," he answered.

The smile faded from Mrs. Gallant's face.

"In pictures!" she exclaimed. "Then she is an——"

"An actress," he supplied. "She invited me out to her studio and told me all about how it was while we had tea in her dressing room. Why, mother! What's the matter? Mother!"

Mrs. Gallant had risen from her chair, a strange, disconsolate expression upon her face, and had gone back into the house.

CHAPTER XI

ASTONISHED even more than he had been when she first questioned the propriety of Consuello's living alone in the city, John hurried into the house after his mother and found her in a chair beside a table in the living room, her head buried in her arms.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, anxiously. "What is wrong? Are you ill? Don't, mother, don't cry. Speak to me, speak to me."

She did not answer. He stepped forward quickly and lifted her face between his hands, tenderly. He saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

"Please," she said, drawing back her head. He dropped his arms to his sides. "Please, I must be alone," she said.

"Tell me, tell me, what is it?" he begged.

Rising a trifle unsteadily to her feet she walked past him to the door. He wheeled as she was about to step out of the room and caught her in his arms.

"Mother, dearest," he pleaded, "what is it? Is it because you do not approve? Is it so terrible that she must work to live and that she plays in pictures? Surely, you can't think wrong of her?"

Slowly she nodded her head. He stepped back in amazement. How could she possibly think such things?

"I had hoped, because she was a friend of yours, that she would be what you thought her," Mrs. Gallant said, tremulously.

"Why, mother, what are you talking about?" he gasped. "She is my friend and there is nothing to make me think that she is anything but what I believed her to be, a dear, kind friend."

Mrs. Gallant clasped her hands at her waist and straightened her shoulders.

"She dared—dared to receive you alone in her dressing room," she said. "John, don't you understand what that means? Don't you know how wrong it was? Do decent girls do such things? An actress! I've heard enough about them. An actress who allows herself to be kissed and held in men's arms! An associate of—"

He raised his hand quickly.

"Mother!" he expostulated, "you can't say that. You can't, you can't."

For a moment they stood facing each other and an expression of despair crossed her features as she whirled around and left the room. John stood stunned until he heard the door of her bedroom close. With a heavy sigh he threw himself into a chair and bowed his head

in his hands, staring distractedly at the design in the rug under his feet.

Until far into the night he sat there, thinking, thinking, thinking. Mingled exasperation and perplexity racked his brain and finally he attempted to collect his thoughts and reason it all out. It was ridiculous, he thought, and yet so serious. Gradually he came to study the entire situation from the viewpoint of his mother and by doing so he came to a solution of the difficulty. His heart softened toward her and he found an excuse for her antipathy for Consuello.

Primarily, he understood his mother's great love for him, her desire to protect him, guard his happiness and assure his success in life was the cause for the unreasonable attitude she had taken toward the girl who had been so kind to him. Perhaps his mother still clung to her hastily-formed idea that he was in love and that his "undisciplined heart"—the descriptive words were fresh in his mind from his reading again of "David Copperfield"—would lead him into trouble.

And then he easily comprehended her aversion to motion pictures and those who played in them, insupportable by facts as it was. The strict, narrow training she had received as a girl had nurtured in her an abhorrence of public performers, particularly actors and ac-

tresses, whom she regarded without exception as libertines. This misconception had been increased by the scandalous and equally slanderous stories that had reached her ears concerning motion pictures and the life led by those engaged in the producing of photoplays in Hollywood.

The faults of one or two who became involved in scandal of some sort she gave to all. Because a motion picture actress, as human as any other woman and as liable to imperfection, sought a divorce in the courts she instantly, in Mrs. Gallant's mind, became an immoral character. A motion picture actor attacked by a blackmailer because of his wealth and prominence, was adjudged guilty of whatever wrong of which he was accused. It was an unfair and unjust attitude common to thousands of women as wholesome in character, as kindly and merciful in disposition and as saintly to those who loved them and were loved by them, as Mrs. Gallant.

In his unsuspecting delight in being able to explain to his mother why Consuello lived apart from her parents, he had completely overlooked her foible in disliking motion picture players simply because they were members of that profession. Likewise he had forgotten precaution by telling her that Consuello had received him in her dressing room. He

had been unable to tell her that Consuello, although she enjoyed work and had a pride in it, had entered the pictures to provide for her aging parents. The confidence, as he regarded it, that Consuello had placed in him in informing him that she and Gibson were engaged to be married, he could not, he felt, reveal.

He pondered for a time over a disconcerting thought that possibly it had not been proper after all, for Consuello to have allowed him to see her in her dressing room, alone, without having previously mentioned to Gibson her intention of doing such a thing. It had been obvious that Gibson was genuinely surprised when he found John with her. He finally dismissed any apprehension created by this thought by recalling Consuello's apparent guilelessness.

He fatigued his brain in a vain endeavor to decide upon some means of overcoming his mother's prejudice. Setting aside the fact that he wanted them to be friends, to know and find in each other the things he admired in them, the principle of the whole affair concerned him. He remembered how different his father had been, how tolerant, how ready to withhold adverse judgment of a person until both sides of the story had been heard.

Weary, unhappy, disconcerted, he went to his bedroom and puzzled over his problem

until he fell asleep. Mrs. Gallant had composed herself, somewhat severely, when he saw her in the morning at breakfast. There was a trace of haggardness in her face that told him she, too, had spent a restless night.

"Mother, dear," he said, holding her in his arms before he left for work, "you know how much I love you." She seemed to yield a little in response to his tenderness.

"I know, my boy," she said, "and you must realize how much I care for you."

"Oh, I do, I do," he said, "you have always been a wonderful, wonderful mother to me. Remember, nothing must come between us."

Her severe aspect, which, he knew, she assumed to compose herself, disappeared and the love that she bore him as her first and only son shone in her eyes as she kissed him when he left. It was like the kisses she had given him when he was a grammar school boy.

Later in the day John met an old friend whom he had almost forgotten. It was the scrawny youth with the twisted nose and the husky voice who had been a second in his corner the night he fought Battling Rodriguez to get money to pay for his father's funeral. He remembered the youth as Murphy when he met him lounging at the counter of a cigar stand at the entrance to one of Spring street's

most celebrated saloons, which now was converted into a soft drink and lunch establishment and which was frequented by men who loitered in and around it for the associations it held for them and the memory of other days.

Murphy, a brown paper cigaret drooping from the corner of his mouth, hailed him as he passed.

"If it ain't da Gallant kid!" he said, speaking from beneath the visor of his cloth cap, pulled tightly around his ears. They shook hands.

"Hello, Murphy, what have you been doing since the night that Mexican nearly killed me?" asked John, feeling somehow that he owed the second something for the care he had taken of him after he had staggered from the ring, bruised and battered.

"Oh, da same old stuff, da same old stuff," Murphy replied. "Haven't been doin' any more fightin', have ya?"

"No," said John, with a laugh, "the beating the Battler gave me was enough. You know, it's a good man who knows when he has had enough."

"Ya didn't seem to know when ya had enough da night ya mixed it with da Battler," said Murphy. "Ya took a beltin' that night and came up for more as long as ya could."

"Let's step inside; I'll buy you a drink of whatever they have," John invited.

Over steins of near-beer which Murphy drank with a wry face John learned that Battling Rodriguez had fought himself to the top and was now boxing main events at Vernon, at the American Legion stadium in Hollywood and occasionally in San Francisco and San Diego. He told Murphy that he was working on the newspaper, endeavoring to develop himself into a reporter.

They were about to leave and had turned away from the bar when there was a scuffle of feet at the front door. John was startled to see a number of men rush in and form a line across the front of the long room.

It flashed into his head that the men were bandits. One of them, he saw, had a gun in his hand. But this suspicion was quickly routed from his mind when one of the men, apparently the leader, stepped forward and shouted a command:

"Get in the corner, there, you birds, you're pinched," he ordered.

John recognized the men as deputy sheriffs and for a moment he was nonplussed. Then he stepped forward to explain there was no cause for them to arrest them.

"In the corner, I said, in the corner,"

shouted the foremost of the deputies, pushing John back. "Get over there or I'll put you there, see!"

John "saw." He stepped back into the corner of the room which the deputy indicated, joining a group of a dozen men herded there by the other deputies who swept through the "saloon." Murphy, beside him, whispered in his ear:

"Don't get excited, kid, it's nuttin'; just another phoney pinch, dat's all."

"But what for?" asked John.

"Loiterin' around a handbook joint. You'll be squared, kid, you'll be squared. Stick with me and you'll come out on top; ten bucks to the good."

One of the deputies marched up to the corner, pushing a young fellow before him.

"Tried to duck out the back door," the deputy explained to his brother officers. He shoved his prisoner into the group in the corner. "I guess that's all of them. Let's get them out of here. Come on, you birds, out the door; step lively and no funny business."

Murphy was at his side as they walked out into the street, guarded on each side by the deputies. A motor truck was backed up to the curb and in it were fifteen or twenty men, young and old, laughing and smoking. A

crowd of men and women, spectators to the raid, thronged the sidewalk on either side.

John stepped to the side of one of the deputies.

"Listen, old man," he said. "I'm a reporter."

The deputy stepped back in mock surprise.

"You don't say so!" he exclaimed. "A reporter, eh? Well, you ain't nobody, see! Why, one of your pals we got in there told me he was the sheriff's nephew. Another one tried to bull me that he was one of Gibson's men."

"Gibson!" exclaimed John. Then it dawned on him; this was one of the police commissioner's "personally conducted" raids, his first attack on "Gink" Cummings, without a doubt.

"Yes, Gibson," said the deputy. "What about it?"

"Is this one of Gibson's raids?" he asked.

"You guessed it," snapped the deputy. "Now, get along there. Hop on that truck with the rest of the gents and see if you can't get consolation from the sheriff's nephew and the bird that tried to bull me he was working for Gibson."

"But I am a reporter," protested John. "You'll find out soon enough."

"Don't get gay!" threatened the deputy.
"Don't get gay!"

John scrambled on the truck.

"Come right along, brother, join our party," said a red-faced man in a brown check suit and a greasy derby hat, who reached down to help John up.

The truck was now crowded with standing men. Three of the deputies swung themselves up on the back of it to act as a rear guard. Murphy squirmed through the tightly packed load until he reached John's side again.

"Listen, kid," he said in his husky voice. "If you want to find out something about dis game, just keep your trap shut and do what Tim Murphy tells you. Get me? I was tipped to dis raid but I didn't know it was coming so soon or I'd got ya out of it, see? It's a phoney, see. There's ten bucks in it for ya if ya go through with it like I tell ya, see?"

"What are you talking about, Murphy?" John demanded.

"I know what I'm talkin' about and don't you forget it," Murphy said. "Just do what I tell ya, will ya?"

"All right," he agreed.

The truck turned to the left at First and Spring streets and struggled up the grade at

First west of Broadway, backing into the curb in front of the central police station. By the time they were leaving the truck John had decided to "go through with it," as Murphy had suggested. It would be an adventure, at least, and Murphy's repeated assertions that it was "a phoney" invited investigation. He knew that a word to Kenyon, the police reporter for his paper, would get him out of his trouble, but he concluded he had nothing to lose and perhaps something to gain by following Murphy's whispered instructions.

Herded into an alley-way leading back to the desk sergeant's room were, John estimated, more than 150 other men and boys, arrested like himself and evidently brought to headquarters in other trucks. In this crowd he learned that every place along Spring street where it was suspected that a handbook on the races at Tia Juana was being operated had been raided simultaneously by squads of deputy sheriffs detailed to the command of Police Commissioner Gibson by the sheriff. Over the heads of the crowd he caught a glimpse of Gibson himself surrounded by Kenyon and the other police reporters. He saw Gibson pose for a photograph with the crowd of men he had arrested as a background. Once, he thought, he had a glimpse of Brennan in conversation with Police Chief Sweeney.

"Have ya got ten bucks on ya?" asked Murphy.

"Why?" he asked.

"Dat's da bail," explained Murphy.

"I've got it," he said. "Have you yours?"

"Murphy's always got his bail money wid him," the twisted nose youth grinned. "Remember, now, stick wid me."

"Right-o," said John.

"Gwan!" Murphy made the word the acme of disgust. "If I hadn't seen ya mix it wid de Battler I'd bust ya for dat," he said. Evidently "right-o" was not a word calculated to win in Twisted Nose's vocabulary.

Slowly, like a line of theatergoers approaching the box office, the crowd worked its way toward the desk sergeant's counter, where two police officers were booking the prisoners, receiving \$10 in bail from each and handing them a receipt for the money. Murphy and John finally reached the counter.

"Murphy—Tim Murphy," said John's companion, stepping up to the desk and speaking before the desk sergeant asked him his name, as if it was an old ceremony which he knew by heart.

"Murphy—Tim Murphy," repeated the officer at the huge book. "If no one was looking, Murphy, I'd slip you out the back door for having a name like that."

Murphy handed over his \$10 in bail, received his receipt slip and stepped to one side to wait for John.

"Gallant—John Gallant," said John, following Murphy's lead.

"Ten bucks," said the desk sergeant.

"No, I mean what am I arrested for?"

"Oh, you're particular, are you? Well, it's loitering in a gambling resort and playing the handbook. I suppose you'll ask for a jury trial?" inquired the officer, with pretended politeness.

He produced his \$10 and was given a receipt. Murphy tugged at his arm.

"Come on," he whispered. "Da sooner we get back da better."

John followed him out into the street. Turning to the right, Murphy walked rapidly down First street toward Broadway, his arm hooked to John's.

"Now, Murphy," he said, "tell me what's this all about—what are you going to do?"

"Well, listen, kid, and I'll spill it to ya," Murphy said, talking as they walked. "Dis raid was all a phoney, get me?"

"A phoney?"

"Ya, a phoney! Fixed, framed, phoney, see? I get my orders da other day. A friend o' mine tips me. He steers me dat de handbooks are goin' to be pulled and if I'm pinched

for me to go through with it and there'll be ten bucks in it for me."

"How?" asked John, impatiently.

"I'll get my ten bucks from da boss for bein' a good little boy and gettin' pinched, see? It's dis way: Dis new commissioner, Gibson, wants to make a big play, get me? He wants to do a grandstand on da bookmakers and de 'Gink's' for him, see?"

"The 'Gink'?" exclaimed John. "'Gink' Cummings?"

"Sssh, not so loud, not so loud," cautioned Murphy.

"You mean to tell me that the 'Gink' is helping Gibson?" John demanded, coming to a standstill.

"Come on," said Murphy, tugging at his arm. "I didn't say dat, did I? All I said was dat da 'Gink' was for him pulling the bookies. Search me, why. I figures it dat da 'Gink' has split with da bookies and is out to teach 'em to behave."

"Then this raid was just what Cummings wanted?"

"Dat's it. If it wasn't we wouldn't be gettin' our ten back and ten on top of it. I was steered to hang around a bookmaking joint for a few days so dat when Gibson and his deputies come there would be somebody to get pinched, see?"

"And were all those other men tipped to do the same thing?"

"Sure. Dey got a few suckers but de bunch was all in on the know."

"But how did the 'Gink' know beforehand that the raid was going to be made?"

"Say," expostulated Murphy, "ask me somepun easy, will ya? Da 'Gink' knows everything before it happens, see? If he didn't he wouldn't be da 'Gink,' dat's all."

A thrill went through John. He was "in on the know," as Murphy had put it. What a discovery he had made! What would Brennan say when he told him? What would the mayor say? And what would Gibson say?

They were back before the place in which they had been arrested. Murphy turned, guiding John by the arm with him.

"Now keep your trap shut and let me do da talkin', see?" he admonished as they went through the swinging doors.

Inside things were exactly as they had been before the raid, except that there were twice as many in the long room. John recognized the red-faced man in the brown check suit and the greasy derby hat who had helped him on to the truck as he stood at the bar, a glass of near-beer in front of him and chatting with the bartender, who was pulling on his white coat again.

Murphy led him to the back room and rapped on a door.

"Come in," a voice called.

Murphy opened the door and entered, beckoning to John with a jerk of the head to follow him.

CHAPTER XII

THE room was small and dark, the only light coming from an electric lamp over an old-fashioned, battered roll-top desk that completely filled the wall at one end. Between John and Murphy and the desk was a scarred oak table behind which sat a thin-faced man, an unlighted cigar protruding from a corner of his mouth.

"Shut the door," said the man, without removing the cigar.

John closed the door.

"Who's this with you, Murphy?" the man snapped out his words and eyed John keenly.

"He's all right, Slim," Murphy replied.

"Sure?" asked "Slim," quizzically.

"I ain't gonna let anybody fool you or me, am I, Slim?"

"Not if you want to stay alive," returned "Slim." "Was he picked up in the raid, too?"

"He was wit me all through it," said Murphy.

"All right, then, I'll take your word for it, Murphy," said the man behind the desk. "But remember, if he's a stoolie, you're the bird that's going to get it."

"Don't I know?" Murphy assured him.

"Where's your tag?" asked "Slim."

Murphy produced the receipt for his bail money and tossed it on the table. "Slim" examined it and then, without looking up, asked:

"And where's yours?"

John noticed Murphy's almost imperceptible jerk of his head. He drew his bail receipt from his pocket and tossed it on the table as Murphy had done. Holding the slip of paper in both hands "Slim" examined it closely, looked up inquiringly at John, and then reached into his pocket, bringing forth a thick roll of bills. He snapped the rubber band from the roll and extracted from it four bills. Returning the roll to his pocket he divided the four bills equally and pushed them across the table.

Murphy took two of the bills and John reached out his hand for the other two. As his fingers touched the bills, "Slim's" hand closed down on them.

"Just a minute," he heard "Slim" say. His nerves jerked tight as he looked down into the thin, hard face of the man in the chair. For two or three seconds they looked into each other's eyes. Then "Slim" spoke.

"You're on the square with Murphy and me?" he asked.

John nodded his head. "Slim" still held his hand on the bills.

"Say it," he demanded.

"I'm on the square with you," John said.

"Slim" released his hand.

"All right, beat it now and forget you ever saw me," he said. John and Murphy left the room, each with two \$10 bills. The red-faced man with the greasy derby winked at John as they passed him. They hurried through the afternoon crowd in Spring street until they were a block from the saloon.

John was the first to speak.

"Murphy," he said, "who is this man, 'Slim'?"

"'Slim's' da right-hand man for da 'Gink.' He's one of da few birds da 'Gink' will trust. And he's one hard-boiled guy, believe me."

"Whose money was that he paid us?"

"Well," Murphy replied, "'Slim' gets his jack from da 'Gink.'"

"Are you sure of that?"

"Say, whatcha think 'Slim' is, a Christmas tree?"

"Now, let me get this right," said John. "The 'Gink' knew this raid was coming off. He arranged with you and most of the others who were arrested to be at the places to be raided so that Gibson's men would have a crowd to take to central station. Then each of those who were arrested and who were 'in on the know,' as you say, were given the

\$10 they put up for bail and \$10 extra for being on hand to be arrested. Is that it?"

"Dat's it."

"And you figure that the 'Gink' wanted Gibson's raid to be a success because the 'Gink' has split with the bookmakers and wants to make trouble for them?"

"Dat's da way I dope it," Murphy assented.

"And we forfeit our bail and forget all about it?"

"Sure."

"If any more of these framed-up raids are made, will you know about it?" John asked.

"Sure, dey always fix it for us regular guys."

"Well, Murphy," said John, halting at a corner, "I'm going to ask you to do something for me. If you find out that anything like this is going to happen again, will you let me know about it?"

"Sure thing; where can I get ya?"

John gave him the number of the reporters' telephone at his office. In exchange Murphy gave him the address of his room, in East Third street.

"You won't forget?" cautioned John as they shook hands. Murphy promised him again and they separated after John had thanked him for letting him "in on the know."

He hurried back toward the office, stopping

only to buy the late edition of his paper. Across the top of the front page, in big, heavy black type, was the headline: "Gibson Leads Big Spring Street Raid." Under this and above the story of the raid was another "head" which read: "Commissioner Says He's After 'Gink' Cummings; 200 Arrested." The photograph of Gibson standing near the men arrested in the raid, which John had noticed him posing for, occupied a four-column space.

At the office P. Q. greeted him with a scowl.

"Well, where have you been all afternoon?" the city editor demanded.

"I was picked up in Gibson's raid," John replied.

"What's the big idea?"

"I didn't have any idea of getting arrested. And I think I've discovered something big."

"What do you mean, big?" Then John told him the story of his experience from beginning to end, producing the two \$10 bills as evidence. He related all that Murphy had told him and how Murphy had promised to tell him in advance of a repetition of the occurrence.

P. Q. listened to him attentively, whistling softly when he had finished.

"Do you think Murphy is right in believing that the 'Gink's' only motive was to make trouble for the bookmakers?" he asked. "Per-

sonally, I doubt if the 'Gink' would play into the hands of Gibson like that even if he was fighting the bookmakers, providing, of course, that he has reason to fear Gibson."

Before John could reply Brennan appeared and the whole story was related to him.

"Your friend, Murphy, is off on the wrong foot," Brennan said. "Don't you know what's happening? The 'Gink' is playing Gibson's game and Gibson is playing his just like the mayor suspects. Someone has told Gibson that people are wondering why he doesn't start after the 'Gink.' So what does he do? He arranges with the 'Gink' to put on a grandstand raid in Spring street and Cummings fixes it with your friend, Murphy, and the others to submit to arrest, paying their bail money and adding \$10 to it to compensate them for their trouble, and Gibson is able to make a big showing.

"Don't you suppose that the 'Gink' would realize that the minute he tried doing what your friend Murphy thinks, some one of the bookmakers would get wise to it and holler?"

"That's my idea of it," put in P. Q.

John was astounded at Brennan's revelation. Clearly Brennan's view of the case was more reasonable, more logical, than that given him by Murphy. He remembered having told Gibson when they met in Consuello's dressing

room that newspapermen were questioning why he did not attack "Gink" Cummings and he remembered Gibson's answer that he was about to make such a move.

"By George, Gallant," exclaimed Brennan, "your little experience this afternoon is liable to turn the town over, if I'm not mistaken. That's why Gibson came out with a statement after the raid denouncing the 'Gink' and claiming that he had gone right into the 'Gink's' territory to demonstrate to the people that he was out to get Cummings. It's a frame-up from start to finish. The 'Gink's' smart enough to know that Gibson couldn't carry through his plan to overthrow the administration unless he made some pretense of opposing him and so he fixes up this raid."

"The question is, What are we going to do with what we have?" commented the city editor. "Do you suppose Murphy would come through with an affidavit?"

"Not unless we furnished him with protection," said John.

"As it stands," said Brennan, "we have Gallant's story and only our conclusions as to what was back of it all. We haven't quite enough yet. For example, this fellow 'Slim,' who paid you the money may be the 'Gink's' right-hand man, all right, but how are we going

to prove it? And, besides, all we know is that Gallant and Murphy were paid off. We don't actually know that anyone else received their bail money back and \$10 on top of it.

"This information that Gallant has brought in satisfies me beyond all doubt that the mayor's right in suspecting that the 'Gink' is back of Gibson. But, before we shoot, it seems to me that we ought to have a little more stuff. We've got to show that Gibson and the 'Gink' are actually working together."

"Brennan's right," P. Q. concurred. "Your story is dynamite, Gallant, but we need a fuse to explode it. We had better sit tight and if it occurs again be in on it so that we can get something to show beyond all doubt that Gibson is a faker and a tool of the 'Gink.' In the meantime, Gallant, you keep in close touch with your friend Murphy."

"What about putting it up to Gibson and seeing what he has to say?" John suggested.

"What about it, Brennan?" asked P. Q.

"That wouldn't get us anywhere," said Brennan. "And if Gibson is playing the 'Gink's' game it would only warn him that we have reason to suspect him and they'd be so careful we'd never have a chance to upset them. Your idea is the best, P. Q. Sit tight for a while and see what happens next."

* * * * *

John told the story of his experience in Gibson's raid on the Spring street bookmakers to two other persons, the mayor and the publisher of the paper that employed him, Cyrus W. Phillips, known fraternally to his men as the "chief." He was accompanied to the private office of the publisher by P. Q., who informed him that his discovery of what could be regarded as evidence that there was an alliance between Gibson and "Gink" Cummings had brought the situation to a point where orders were to be given by the "chief," who supervised the policy of the paper.

Mr. Phillips, a keen-eyed, energetic man, who unselfishly bestowed the credit for the success of his newspaper on the men who worked under him, listened to John's story with interest. It was John's first meeting with the "chief," for whom even Brennan, with all his skepticism, had a profound respect and the rapidity with which the publisher gave his decision won his admiration.

"The policy of this paper has been to keep out of politics," he said, "but this young man's story, with what it undoubtedly suggests, brings us face to face with the duty we have always endeavored to fulfill, that is, to attack graft and corruption wherever we find them. We have no pledge to support either the mayor or Commissioner Gibson and we are

only for the one who is doing the right thing in the right way.

"'Gink' Cummings and men of his type we regard as a menace to Los Angeles against whom every effort should be made. If Gibson is a masquerader in league with Cummings he must be exposed. If this is only an attempt at political retaliation by the mayor we must condemn it.

"We have indisputable evidence that the raid was framed by Cummings, but whether he acted to make trouble for the bookmakers or to enable Gibson to make a big showing we do not know. The more logical view to take is that there may be an alliance between Gibson and Cummings, improbable as it may appear. But we must not pre-judge nor act hastily.

"Commissioner Gibson has the support of the churches and the business men of Los Angeles. If he has deceived them and is only a tool for Cummings, he is the most infamous imposter that the city has ever known and it would be a big thing for us as well as a great deed in behalf of the city if we are able to expose him. On the other hand, if Gibson is really what he claims to be and what his supporters believe him to be, he is working for the betterment of Los Angeles and is entitled to our unqualified support.

"Consequently, we must keep our eyes open. We must work to establish beyond all doubt Gibson's sincerity or duplicity. What we do must be fair and fearless and with only one object, the welfare of the city of Los Angeles."

"Would it be advisable to let the mayor hear Gallant's story?" asked P. Q.

"Only with the distinct understanding that it is not to be used by him for any purpose whatsoever and that we are taking a strictly neutral position on it, even inclining to the view that it does not necessarily indicate that Gibson and Cummings are in a conspiracy," the publisher replied. "I can say this much to you, I admire the mayor for having made an enemy of 'Gink' Cummings."

As they left his office the "chief" shook hands with John.

"P. Q. tells me you have not been with us long," he said. "The information you have obtained for us is very important and you did well. I want you to feel that you know me now and that I am very glad you are with us."

He visited the mayor's office in company with Brennan to whom P. Q. had imparted the publisher's instructions. The mayor's secretary ushered them into his office immediately. He greeted them both warmly and opened the conversation with a question directed to Brennan.

"What do you make of Gibson's raid yesterday?" he asked.

"We'll answer that by telling you something mighty interesting," said Brennan. "Gallant here has some information that will knock your eye out."

Once again John told his story, from beginning to end. As he related it the mayor sat upright in his chair, listening so intently to every word that the fire at the end of his cigar died out and the ash dropped unnoticed on his coat front. When John concluded the mayor bounced out of his chair, circled his desk and seizing him by the hand exclaimed:

"My boy, you've done it!"

John's story seemed to have rejuvenated him. He shook hands with Brennan, went back to his desk, sat down, bounced up again, wasted five matches in a vain attempt to relight his cigar and then chose a fresh one from a box he took from a drawer.

"I know that fellow 'Slim' who paid you the money," the mayor went on. "His name is Gray and he IS the 'Gink's' right-hand man; has been for years. It almost made me believe Gibson might be straight when he conducted that raid yesterday. I was beginning to wonder if I wasn't mistaken, after all, but now I'm convinced for once and all that he is the 'Gink's' man. I'm willing to wager my

life that he and Cummings arranged for that raid yesterday because they knew that people were beginning to ask themselves why he didn't get after the 'Gink.'

"What a shrewd pair they are! I've got the fight of my life on my hands now and you, my boy"—to Gallant—"have done something for me I'll never forget. Brennan, what are you going to do with this evidence?"

Brennan explained how the matter had been presented to the publisher of their paper and related what the "chief" had said to John and P. Q. He cautioned the mayor that John's story was not to be used by him or revealed to anyone.

"Trust me," assured the mayor. "But can I rely upon you boys to keep me in touch with what develops?"

"We will tell you everything we are permitted to disclose," promised Brennan. "In return for what information we give you we will expect you to furnish us with what information comes into your hands."

"Agreed," said the mayor.

Brennan and John rose to leave. The mayor came from behind his desk and with his arms around their shoulders walked with them to the door. There he chuckled, and, leaning toward them, said:

"Boys, I guess your old Uncle Dudley isn't such a so-and-so kind of an old fool after all, is he?"

From the city hall John and Brennan, by previous arrangement, sought out Murphy, whom they found at the East Third street rooming house, the address of which he had given John. His room was cheaply furnished and the walls of it decorated with prints of boxers, sporting life notables, knockout fight pictures and photographs of shapely bathing beauties in one-piece suits. He appeared surprised when the two reporters entered as he opened the door.

"Murphy," said John, "this is Brennan, a friend of mine. We want to have a little talk with you."

"Glad to meet a friend of da Gallant kid," Murphy said, shaking hands with Brennan. He reached into a drawer and brought out a quart bottle of whisky which he placed on a table with a single glass into which he poured a generous portion.

"Drink up, gents, and do your stuff," he invited.

John did the talking. He explained to Murphy that he and Brennan were newspaper men and that he had told Brennan of their experience in the raid and their meeting with "Slim" Gray.

"Hey, back up," Murphy interrupted. "Let me get ya straight. Are you birds plannin' to show 'Slim' and the 'Gink' up?"

"Murphy," said John, "can we trust you?"

"I went da limit for you, didn't I?" asked Murphy, looking at John.

"You did," agreed John, remembering how Murphy had vouched for him to "Slim" Gray. "That's why we're here now. We figure you can help us and if you do we'll see that you are taken care of."

"You're straight with dat?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, do your stuff, then, do your stuff!"

At a nod from Brennan, John placed the whole situation before Murphy, explaining every part of it carefully.

"Now, what we want you to do is this," he said. "We want you to find out everything you can about what the 'Gink' is doing and let us know as soon as you learn it."

Murphy listened without interrupting until John had finished.

"Do you know what'll happen to me if de 'Gink' finds I'm peachin' on him?" he asked.

"We have an idea——" John began.

"An idea!" Murphy exclaimed, contemptuously. "Well, I got more than an idea, see?

I know what'd happen to me, see? I get my head kicked in, see?"

"We'll promise you that for every piece of information you give us you'll get enough money to make it worth your while," put in Brennan.

"Dat's straight?" asked Murphy, turning to John.

"That's straight," John assured him.

They left a few minutes later with Murphy's pledge, given with an oath worded far stronger than the customary legal one, to act as their informant and to keep secret every word they had told him.

"De 'Gink's' no pal of mine, see?" said Murphy as they left his room. "I'm wise enough to know that he'd cross me in a minute, see?"

The interrogative "see?" that Murphy used to punctuate his sentences was invariably accompanied with a gesture of his hand that resembled a baseball umpire's gesture in calling a runner safe at a base more than anything John could think of.

Before dinner that night Mrs. Gallant handed him an envelope which she said she received in the afternoon's mail. It was addressed to him and opening it he found that it was a note from Consuello.

"My dear Mr. Gallant," he read, "could you and your dear mother accompany me home Sunday for dinner? I can arrange to call for you and bring you home in the car. I would be delighted to have you with me and am anxious for father and mother to meet Mrs. Gallant. Cordially, Consuello Carrillo."

CHAPTER XIII

SINCE the night Mrs. Gallant had gone weeping to her room after John told her that Consuello played in motion pictures, the girl had never been mentioned by either of them. John refrained from speaking of her because he decided that until he found some way to overcome the prejudice his mother held it would only cause unpleasantness. There had never been a night following that when Mrs. Gallant had displayed her disapproval of Consuello that John had not racked his brain to decide how he could eradicate his mother's intolerant attitude and bring her to know and appreciate Consuello for the girl she was.

At times he was annoyed by his mother's bigotry which gave her, in Consuello's case, an unreasonableness that amounted almost to fanaticism and embittered the natural sweetness of her character and disposition. His suspicion that her condemnation of photoplays and everyone connected with them was being fostered by someone else had been substantiated by an incident which occurred shortly after the night she had turned her back on Consuello.

That Mrs. Sprockett, "from across the

street"—as John always thought of her—had interrupted one of the evening chats he always had with his mother. His impulsive dislike of Mrs. Sprockett caused him to leave her alone on the porch with his mother while he retired to the living room to read. The window to the porch was open.

"Isn't it terrible?" he heard Mrs. Sprockett say. "They tell me that she had been married three times and smokes cigarettes right in front of everyone. Women like her are a disgrace to a nation and we mothers should do something, I tell you."

From further snatches of the conversation John learned that Mrs. Sprockett was referring to a motion picture actress who had been given a decree of divorce that day.

"I told my Alma at dinner, tonight, that she had better not let me catch her sneaking off to the picture show," Mrs. Sprockett continued. Alma, John knew, was the oldest of Mrs. Sprockett's daughters. "What are things coming to when girls wear their skirts above their knees and bob their hair and think nothing of taking up with the first man they meet? When you and I were girls, Mrs. Gallant, we would have been locked up if we had attempted such performances.

"I tell you we owe it to our children to crush these creatures that set such wicked ex-

amples. And Mr. Sprockett agrees with me in every word I say."

As far as John knew, Mrs. Sprockett's husband had never, never disagreed with her—for good and sufficient reasons. He had recalled how Mrs. Sprockett's husband trailed her from house to house in the neighborhood evenings while the Sprockett baby wailed for attention.

He drew Consuello's note from his pocket while he and his mother were in the living room after dinner and read it again. He debated in his mind what he should do and finally handed it to his mother without a word. Mrs. Gallant adjusted her spectacles and read the note through slowly. John studied her face and he imagined he saw her lips tremble slightly.

She evaded meeting his eyes as she handed the note back to him. He waited for her to speak, but she was silent and he realized with a sinking feeling that her attitude toward Consuello had not changed. He determined, however, to dispose of the matter quickly.

"Well, mother," he said. "How shall I answer her?"

"It was very kind of her to include me but under the circumstances, John, I——"

"Very well, mother."

"But, my boy——"

"Yes."

"Don't let me stop you from going and please don't let it harden your heart against me."

"Mother, are you sure you're not making a sad mistake in letting your heart harden against her?" he could not resist saying.

Her lips trembled and her handkerchief went to her eyes. Leaving his chair he crossed to where she was sitting and put his arm around her.

"There, mother, we must not let anything come between us," he said, tenderly. "It's all right, mother; it's all right!"

The next day, Saturday, he telephoned to Consuello early in the morning, soon after he reached the office, in order to catch her before she left for the studio.

"I was just about to call you," she said. "Did you get my note?"

"Yes."

"I'm so sorry, but it will be impossible for me to get home, tomorrow. My director insists that we go out on location in the morning. You understand, don't you?"

"Certainly," he replied. He had decided to tell her that his mother was ill and unable to accept her invitation. His relief was beyond words when he discovered that it would be unnecessary for him to fabricate an excuse for

Mrs. Gallant, although he realized it was only postponing the time when he should be compelled to prevent Consuello learning of his mother's harsh judgment of her.

"I was so anxious that we should have a perfect day together, your mother, yourself, father and mother and I. But we can arrange it for some other time, can't we?"

"I'm sure we can." He felt justified somehow in taking this optimistic view.

"And I wanted to ask you, would you care to come out with us on location, tomorrow? We have several scenes to do and I'm sure you will find it interesting."

"It would be wonderful."

"If you can be at the studio at nine?"

"I'll be there."

"And you'll explain how it is to your mother and tell her how sorry I am, won't you?"

"She'll understand." He felt he was not trifling as much with truth in that answer.

Carrying out a conclusion he reached during the day, John did not tell his mother of his conversation over the telephone with Consuello. He told her only that he would be away most of Sunday, permitting her to deduce that he had accepted Consuello's invitation and had made some explanation of her absence.

A dozen automobiles were in line along

the driveway of the Peerless studio when John arrived promptly at nine o'clock, the following morning. Consuello had evidently told the guard at the gate that she was expecting him. It was only necessary for him to mention his name.

"Miss Carrillo asks that you be directed to her dressing room," the gateman said.

With one exception the automobiles were already occupied. John recognized the cameramen with their equipment piled in one of the cars. In another he discerned his guide, "John J. Silence," and in another he caught a glimpse of the sad-eyed bass 'cello player, his huge instrument beside him.

As he left the driveway to cross to the dressing room building he saw Consuello coming toward him. She wore the dainty white "old fashioned" dress, as John had named it in his mind, that she had when they first met at the Barton Randolph lawn fete. She was Consuello and yet because of her facial "make-up," she was the girl he had seen before the camera on the occasion of his first visit to the studio.

"They're waiting for me," she explained as John met her. "You'll ride with us."

She led him to the first automobile in the line. In the front seat, beside the driver, was

the man with the horn-rim glasses whom John recognized as her director. They took seats in the tonneau and he shook hands with the director whom Consuello introduced as "Mr. Bonwit." Heading the caravan of machines their car started out of the driveway.

"I wanted Reggie—Mr. Gibson—to come with us," she explained, "but he had other engagements, something to do with his work, and could not get away. He promised to join us later. I am anxious to hear what he has been doing and what you think of it. I know all about his raid on those places in Spring street."

His part in the raid with the suspicion it directed against Gibson as an ally of "Gink" Cummings returned to him. Principally because of the faith Consuello had in Gibson he had been unable to convince himself that the commissioner was in league with Cummings, despite the arguments advanced by Brennan and the attitude taken by the publisher of his newspaper, a view that did not reject the possibility that Gibson was a masquerader.

"He told me that what you said about newspaper men wondering why he did not attack 'Gink' Cummings caused him to decide to make the raid," she went on. "You may not believe it, but he respects your judgment and

has a great deal of admiration for you and the man who works with you, Brennan, isn't it?"

Passing the outskirts of the city the machines took them through a district being built up with pretty little bungalows of varied colors and architecture.

"I often wonder," she said, "whether the people who live in these houses ever realize what Mr. Gibson is trying to do for them. They seem so apart from the hurry and scurry of life; they see so little of the evil he is trying to save them from. They read of him, perhaps, and commend him in their minds for what he is doing and let it go at that. I don't suppose they ever feel they owe him a personal debt of gratitude."

"It is a common fault to hold aloof and think little of danger until it strikes home to you," John said. "And yet I envy them for what they do not know, for what they do not see, for their self-content."

Leaving the city behind, the automobile swung on to a boulevard leading toward the hills. She explained to him the purpose of their trip.

"It is what we call a 'retake,'" she said. "The scenes we will do today were done several weeks ago, but the photography did not satisfy Mr. Bonwit. We will do them

over again, resurrecting the sweetheart you saw me mourning so sadly for back on the interior set. They are the scenes in which he asks me to marry him and in which I plight my troth, as the title writer insists upon describing it."

"Perhaps that's why Mr. Gibson isn't with us," suggested John.

"It may be," she laughed. "He saw the original scenes played and pretended to be madly jealous of the leading man."

The "location" on which the cameras were trained for the scenes enacted by Consuello was idealistic as an outdoor setting. Shasta daisies, primroses and stalks of purple and white larkspur, in riotous profusion, gave splotches of bright color that stood out vividly against the bosky green. Stately, restful trees gave bounteous shade. A brook, tumbling down the hillside, gurgled over clean, white stones and sand.

There was a lengthy conference between the photographers and Bonwit, the director, relative to the light effects. Oblongs of white cloth tacked on a wood framework, which John learned were used to reflect and deflect the sun's rays, were shifted from one spot to another and back again until the camera men were completely satisfied.

The sad-eyed bass viol player with his com-

panions, the violinist and the 'cellist, occupied folding chairs several yards to the right of the cameras, where they were protected from the sun in the shade of a tree. "John J. Silence," whom John discovered was an assistant director, made countless trips to and from the automobiles for things that everyone seemed to have forgotten and left in the machines.

John had never seen such precaution exercised. It was fully an hour before Consuello and her sweetheart in the photoplay began rehearsing. He was a young fellow, with smooth black hair that John considered almost as perfect as that of Gibson, which had irritated him when he first met the police commissioner. And, as John had also thought of Gibson, the actor playing opposite Consuello was too immaculate.

First, Consuello and the actor came slowly toward the cameras, hand in hand, a typical pair of straying lovers, so affected by each other's presence that they spoke only with their eyes, sidelong glances of ardent devotion. Then they stood still, facing each other, their profiles toward the cameras, he holding her hands down to her sides, telling her of his love for her while she hung her head. As he finished she lifted her face, smiled, and he clasped her to his breast, looking up as if he

was thanking his Creator for giving her to him.

They held that pose for what John thought was an unnecessarily long time, and that was all of the first scene. John was happy to note, for a reason he neglected to define, even to himself, that Consuello seemed relieved as she drew back from the actor's arms. They rehearsed it a dozen times before Bonwit and the cameramen decided it could be done no better and then the cameras clicked.

Next there was a pretty little scene, without much action, in which Consuello and her "sweetheart" were seated beside each other with a background of flowers. John deduced that obstacles had evidently risen to the marriage, as the "conversation" was serious and inclined to be tearful. During this scene the three-piece orchestra, by this time coatless and collarless, played the most plaintively sad piece, John thought, that he had ever heard. The bass viol player's face was almost funereal as he gazed abstractedly up into the branches of the tree above him. The scene ended with the actor looking soulfully into the eyes of his betrothed.

When scene number two had been photographed, "John J. Silence" amazed John by suddenly shouting "Eats!" and dashing toward the automobiles. A large wicker ham-

per was lifted from one of the cars and carried to a clear space near the cameras. Consuello seated herself in a canvas chair near John, who sat cross-legged at her feet. They were apart from the others, who formed a group under another tree. From the hamper "John J. Silence" brought them two small baskets, covered with snow-white napkins, containing sandwiches, a piece of pie, a slice of cake, ripe olives, salted almonds and paper cups, which, at Consuello's suggestion, John filled with water from the stream.

"I don't blame him," remarked John as they settled down to enjoy the basket luncheon.

"Who?"

"Gibson," he said.

"For what?"

"For hating that make-believe sweetheart of yours," he answered.

"But he is only—only as you said—make-believe," she said. "He has the sweetest little wife and two of the darlingest children you ever saw. He probably is thinking of them while he's holding me in his arms and pledging undying love. Whenever he has to shed tears he thinks of the time the baby had pneumonia and nearly died."

"Make-believe," he repeated. "My friend Brennan—whom Gibson spoke to you of—says that life is all make-believe; that we all

play at make-believe—some of us rightfully, but most of us wrongfully.”

Subconsciously he thought of Brennan's indictment of Gibson as a fraud and a dishonest “make-believe,” a consummate actor in the role of a villain in real life.

“I'm often inclined to believe it,” she said slowly. “Perhaps that's why life is sometimes a huge joke and sometimes nothing but sadness and disillusionment. We play our little game of make-believe and strut around proudly, making ourselves, as well as others, think that we amount to something and then comes death, like a curtain; the footlights go out and where are we? Who thinks of us then?”

“Only the few who have loved us with all our faults and vain deceit and make-believe,” he replied.

A series of “close-ups,” were photographed after lunch. Consuello went into the actor's embrace again to permit a “close-up” of his fervent expression of love and thankfulness as he looked upward to the sky. John didn't mind the repetition of this scene. He thought of the actor's wife and two babies, especially the one who was his father's “tear provoker.” There was another in which Consuello, her head inclined, admired the fresh crisp beauty of a bouquet of daisies. She lifted her face

to gaze with a faraway look past the cameras, apparently registering longing for her absent sweetheart. John followed her gaze and discovered it was fixed on the woebegone countenance of the bass viol player, whose melancholy seemed to be increased by his dim realization that he was the object on which she concentrated in her abstract mood.

In a third "close-up" the actor registered the deepness of his love by thrusting his chin forward and staring unblinkingly over John's head. It was an effective piece of facial expression, John thought, as the actor's eyes were as soft as a fawn's. Photographs of Richard Barthelmess and John Barrymore in similar poses came back into John's mind.

John and Consuello were beside each other again on the return trip to the studio.

"I expect Reggie will be there waiting for us," she said. "We have a dinner engagement and I will have to dress at the studio. I'm sorry that he and you and I cannot have dinner together, we have so much to talk about."

"You have been kind enough," he said. "I have enjoyed myself thoroughly and I would be intruding if I occupied any more of your time."

"Intruding?" she repeated, with a rising inflection of her voice. "Why, it was kind of you to be with me."

"But you must remember—" he began.

"Remember?"

"Yes, remember there is someone else who should be considered."

"Oh, Reggie's glad that he has a substitute for trips like this and I've told you that he respects your judgment," she said.

Gibson was in his two-seated car at the entrance to the studio when they arrived. They left their machines at the gateway to meet him.

"Again?" he asked as they met. "You two certainly find each other interesting."

He smiled as he spoke, but a queer feeling went through John as he realized that Consuello had failed to tell Gibson that she had invited him to be with her.

"I'm acquainting Mr. Gallant with the process of picture making," Consuello said. However she received Gibson's salutatory remark she gave no hint of her feeling in the tone of her voice.

"When are you going to show her through a newspaper office, Gallant?" Gibson was still smiling. Consuello replied before John could speak.

"Whenever you and I can find time, I'm sure," she said. "You'll excuse me for a moment; I must hurry along so I won't keep

you waiting long, Reggie. And Mr. Gallant, I'll arrange for a car to take you home."

She hurried away, skipping toward the dressing room building. Unconscious of each other, Gibson and Gallant watched her until she disappeared from their sight. When they turned toward each other simultaneously, John had a peculiarly embarrassed feeling, as if he had been caught doing something which he had no right to do.

Gibson's smile was confusing.

"A wonderful, wonderful girl," he said, drawing a finely embossed cigaret case.

"Yes," said John, instinctively apprehensive of making a more enthusiastic concurrence.

"A whole-hearted, dear, unsuspecting girl," said Gibson, without offering the cigaret case to John.

"Yes."

"A girl who makes a friend of everyone she meets."

Wasn't that "everyone" emphasized a trifle?

"A girl a man would do almost anything for." He was still smiling.

"Yes."

"By the way, Gallant, has she told you we are engaged to be married?"

John hesitated and chose to keep the confidence she had placed in him.

"No," he said. "You ARE to be congratu-

lated." He had a secret satisfaction in stressing the "are."

Gibson lighted his cigarette.

"I just thought I'd tell you," he said and John thought— or was it his imagination?— that Gibson's set smile flattened a little at the corners.

CHAPTER XIV

UNDER Brennan's patient tutelage John progressed rapidly, learning thoroughly the rudiments of newspaper reporting in its two branches, news gathering and writing. P. Q. occasionally gave advice which John knew came from a man who took a secret pride in supervising the remarkable metamorphosis of a "cub" into a well trained reporter. It was the gossip of newspaper workers that P. Q. excelled in the training of his reporters whom he handled with the tact of a psychologist and the care of a manager of a baseball team for his players. Nothing gave him more pleasure than to develop a "cub" into a star and there were dozens of star men throughout the country whom he brought to the top and who still thought him the "greatest of them all."

Brennan was one of the star men who broke into newspaper work under P. Q. Between P. Q. and his star reporter there was a peculiar relationship which John studied with interest. When Brennan performed some especially clever piece of work the city editor treated him as though it was unnecessary for him to give any praise or commendation. When Brennan disappointed him, which was seldom,

P. Q. would berate him with the same caustic fervor that lashed a stupid, thick-headed reporter to a point of self-abnegation that gave him thoughts of suicide as the only way out of his misery.

The praise Brennan received from P. Q. came to him in a roundabout way and the star reporter drank it in as eagerly as a "cub," knowing as he did it that it was a "master" who praised. P. Q. would summon some offending reporter to his desk and after scolding him would laud Brennan to the skies.

"If you had only one-tenth the sense that Brennan has there might be some hope for you," the city editor would say. "Brennan is a real newspaper man, a real reporter. I wouldn't trade him for any dozen men in the country. Watch Brennan, read the stuff he writes and study the way he does things if you want to become a reporter."

These words, P. Q. knew, would get back to Brennan, who would cross-examine the reporter to get every word of the city editor's commendation. Yet between them, except for rare occasions when they went out to lunch together, there was a "strictly business" attitude that was deceiving. Brennan's loyalty to P. Q. was only rivaled by the city editor's covert admiration for him as a reporter. Several times John overheard wordy altercations be-

tween P. Q. and Brennan in which the city editor would threaten to discharge him and Brennan would reply with a threat to resign, but nothing ever came of these quarrels and they were forgotten within an hour after they occurred.

From Brennan John received precious bits of advice.

"Never argue with a city editor," Brennan warned him. "It's useless. Don't ever, no matter how friendly he is, get familiar with one of them. It's ruinous."

Gradually John learned Brennan's story. An Englishman by birth and a university man, Brennan was a rancher in Alberta for a year before he joined the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. He had been everywhere and seen everything. He became a reporter under P. Q. in a Middle West city, and his first training received, he became restless again. He went to Central America to participate in a revolution and then to the South Sea islands. For a time he had been in China, Japan and India, and Kipling's verse was given its proper swing when he recited it. He was a fast, hard boxer and John had to extend himself to hold his own when they sparred for exercise at Blake's gymnasium.

"Something of a soldier; something of a dreamer; something of a poet—but only a

newspaper man," he once described himself, adding a few seconds later, "Oh, forget it," as though he was ashamed to soliloquize about himself.

To John he was unstinted in his laudation of P. Q., whose eccentricities he knew so well.

"P. Q. has always believed that a hungry reporter is the best reporter," Brennan told John. "He swears that a reporter works twice as well when he is hungry as when he is well fed. He says a person can't help but become somewhat soggy mentally when his stomach is full, while an empty stomach makes a keen brain. That's why he never has breakfast until after the first edition is away. He practices what he preaches."

Assigned to work as Brennan's "leg man," the newspaper term for understudy, John became acquainted with the men in Los Angeles who appear almost daily in the news. He met Le Compte Davis, Paul Schenck, Joe Ford, Dick Kittrelle, Al MacDonald, W. I. Gilbert, Frank Dominguez and Jud Rush among the lawyers; the district attorney and his staff of deputies; "Bud" Hill, the county counsel; police detectives, deputy sheriffs, private detectives, city and county officials, federal agents and a host of others, including such picturesque characters as Martin Aguirre, court bailiff, former sheriff and one-time warden of San

Quentin; Charlie Sebastian, whom the reporters declared unanimously was a capable chief of police, despite his faults; Billy Wong, representing the Bing Kong Tong of Chinatown, and "Cap" Gillis, Chinatown "lookout" and undying friend of the police reporters.

Le Compte Davis they met in his turret-like office room in the Bryson block, examining a tattered book under a microscope. He learned that Davis had a private library of more than 8,000 volumes and was one of the rare old book lovers of the city. His office room was stacked with books he had purchased, several of which were to be sent to England to be handsomely bound by hand. On the wall were several oil paintings, one of which Davis bought at an auction for \$75 and which he had been offered more than \$1,000 for.

"Sometimes Le Compte Davis disappears in the middle of a busy day and scouts are sent out to look for him," Brennan told him. "Invariably they find him at some bookstore, pawing over a recent purchase of old books, or in some second-hand store where he picks up rare and costly things for a few dollars.

"He's such a shark on books that whenever he goes into a bookstore the proprietor details a clerk to follow him around. When Le Compte takes a book from a shelf, examines it and returns it to its place, the clerk takes the

book down and immediately doubles the price of it.

"He would rather get some old book that's listed in his catalogue as valuable for a few cents than win the most important law case."

The offices of Davis and his partner, Jud Rush, who was once a cowboy in California, were picturesque in themselves because of the furnishings, as quaint and dusty as those pictured by Dickens. The furniture was mid-Victorian, the rugs and carpets worn by the feet of countless clients, and a musty odor of old books and papers permeated the air. It was like stepping back fifty years to enter the waiting room.

"I don't know whether Le Compte realizes it," Brennan said, "but it's good psychology for him to keep his office as it is. It suggests stability, dignity, soundness. A person feels like he is entering the office of secure, reliable, established lawyers when he comes in here. It has twice the effect of entering a bright, shiny, new office, smelling of varnish and neatly kept."

Frequently Brennan and John lunched with Paul Schenck and his partner, Dick Kittrelle, at a little eating place in West Second street frequented by lawyers, newspaper men, police officers, deputy sheriffs and others who were thrown into contact daily in the making and

gathering of news. There Schenck would discourse on psychiatry and psychology, his two hobbies, talking of "phobias" and "complexes" and maintaining that everyone in the eyes of others has a touch of insanity.

"I believe, with Le Compte Davis, that the two things that a successful lawyer must have are tact and an instinctive knowledge of psychology," Schenck would tell them.

They were interesting days for John. He heard the "inside" stories of famous murder cases, municipal upheavals, political battles, celebrated trials and notable "beats" scored by reporters in the history of newspaper work in Los Angeles. He saw behind the scenes and what he learned made a distinct impression on his receptive brain. He was surprised to find that most of those he met, whom Brennan described as the "head-line boys," shared Brennan's skeptical viewpoint, rejoicing as he did when their doubts were overcome and their faith in their fellow men re-established.

These men differed on the question of Gibson's sincerity in his "clean up" crusade. Some of them believed him to be an altruist, while others, without evidence to support their views, regarded him with suspicion. The opinion of the skeptics was that Gibson was either a plain "glory-seeker" or, despite his denials of the reports to that effect, a potential candidate for mayor.

"He knows that no man can become mayor of Los Angeles unless he has the support of respectable citizenry, represented by the churches and business and civic welfare associations, as well as the women's clubs," one of them said. "After he is elected mayor he may break his pledges to these organizations, but as soon as he does he's through."

Late one afternoon, two weeks after his last meeting with Consuello and Gibson, Brennan and John were gossiping at the office, speculating on Gibson's next move.

"He'll pull another stunt soon," Brennan declared. "When he does it's up to us to dig in and find out what's behind it. If we can get a little more evidence like that you stumbled on to when he raided the Spring street book-makers, we'll be on the trail of the biggest story that's broken here in years."

"Isn't there a chance that he's straight?" asked John, still unable to believe that the man Consuello had such unfailing faith in was the man Brennan suspected him to be.

"If he is it won't be the first time I've been wrong," said Brennan, "but it will be the biggest jolt I ever got, let me tell you that."

* * *

They received no word from Murphy until nearly a month after Gibson's spectacular Spring street raid. He appeared at the office

late one afternoon with the information that he had "hot stuff" concerning "Gink" Cummings.

He declared that Cummings had ordered that all crime stop immediately in the city.

"Da 'Gink' has passed out da word dat da boys gotta lay off," said Murphy. "He gives orders dat there's to be no rough stuff until he says so."

"You mean that the 'Gink' is closing up the town?" asked Brennan.

"Dat's what I say," replied Murphy. "He says there ain't to be no stick-ups, no gamblin', no bootleggin', no pocket pickin', no house jobs, no bunko stuff, no nothin' and dat goes. Da first bird dat tries workin' is gonna be run outa town, see?"

"Where do you pick up that information, Murphy?" Brennan asked.

"Well, da 'Gink' don't tell me poisonally, see? But I gets it straight, see? Da stick-ups, da sure-thing guys, da dips, everybody gets orders to lay off, see?"

Brennan whistled softly.

"What's the 'Gink' got up his sleeve now, I wonder?" he said.

"Soich me," said Murphy.

"Are they obeying the 'Gink's' orders?"

"I'll say they are!" asserted Murphy. "All the gamblin' places are closed and everybody

stopped doin' business, see? Even da girls is behavin' and only enough dope to keep da boys goin' bein' peddled, see?"

"I see," said Brennan, "but it's got me. I can't figure out what his game is."

With P. Q. approving the cashier's voucher for the money, Murphy was paid \$25 for the information he gave Brennan and John, who told him to watch the situation in Spring street closely and report to them often.

The information furnished by Murphy that "Gink" Cummings had ordered that crime be stopped in Los Angeles was substantiated by the developments of the following week. The crime wave that had been sweeping the city, as it had the nation, came to an abrupt halt. During the week only one holdup was reported to the police and prohibition officers were surprised to find that bootleggers had stopped their work. There were no burglaries, gambling, picking of pockets, bunko swindling or handbook betting. The traffic in narcotics, police and federal officers reported, was the lowest in years.

Police Chief Sweeney and the mayor were baffled by the sudden stop of crime and frankly admitted their bewilderment to Brennan and John.

"It's beyond me," said the mayor. "All we can do is wait and see what happens. They

are up to something big, that's a certainty, but I can't figure it out."

Then, after peace and quiet had reigned in the city for ten days, Gibson issued a statement claiming that he and the forces supporting him, including his investigators and detectives, had done what the mayor and Chief Sweeney were unable to do, stopped crime in Los Angeles.

"I call the attention of the citizens of Los Angeles to the fact that within the past ten days there has been less crime in the city than in years," Gibson's statement read. "There has been but one holdup, no burglaries, no violence, no banditry and no open gambling, bootlegging, thievery or trafficking in narcotics.

"My investigators report that the lid is down tight, solely and exclusively because 'Gink' Cummings, the notorious boss of the underworld, and his gang of crooks know that I mean business and that those behind me are in the fight to a finish for a clean city.

"I am gratified, of course, to find that the crusade is having its effect and that Los Angeles is beginning to enjoy the protection to which it is entitled, although the entire situation discloses the deplorable state of inefficiency in the police department and the fail-

ure of Chief Sweeney and the mayor to enforce the law."

Brennan smiled broadly when he read the Commissioner's latest proclamation.

"That modest, shrinking violet we hear of so often is a shrieking braggart alongside of our grand young crusader," he remarked. "What a dumb-bell I was not to have seen what was coming!"

John realized that Brennan believed he had discovered the reason for "Gink" Cummings' order to close the city to crime and unlawfulness.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"It's a mighty slick trick," explained the star reporter. "Don't you see how it works? Cummings, wanting everyone to believe Gibson really has the ability to close up the town, gives orders for the bandits and crooks to 'lay off,' as Murphy put it. Then Gibson comes out and claims credit for closing up the city. The 'Gink' and Gibson planned this stunt together; otherwise, how did Murphy happen to find out about it? And what was the 'Gink's' reason for closing the town if it wasn't to give Gibson a chance to claim the credit?"

"Still, there's a chance that it was only a coincidence, that the 'Gink' had some other

reason to call his men off and that Gibson, believing that he really had frightened Cummings and his gang, took advantage of an opportunity and claimed the credit for it," suggested John.

Brennan inhaled deeply on his cigaret before answering.

"Gallant," he said, "you really don't think it happened that way, do you? Don't let your credulousness put you on the wrong track. Who do you suppose it was who told Gibson's investigators that it was his crusade that was closing up the town? Remember, the 'Gink' is the mayor's enemy and he isn't going to do anything unless it's against the mayor. He simply passed out the word he was afraid of Gibson to give Gibson a chance to claim the glory."

The mayor and Sweeney, as well as P. Q., who knew that Murphy had given Brennan and John advance information regarding the ceasing of crime, agreed with Brennan that Gibson and the "Gink" had framed the whole affair.

Gibson's announcement that the ebb of the crime wave was the result of his crusade brought renewed expressions of commendation and pledges of support from organizations and individuals lined up behind him. Churches, women's clubs, civic and business organiza-

tions, groups of citizens and prominent men and women of the city were outspoken in their praise of the police commissioner, hailing him as the "man of the hour." A well known minister addressed a mass meeting at his church, his subject being "Police Commissioner Gibson's Remarkable Success and the Disgrace of Having a Mayor Who Fails to Do His Duty." Other preachers delivered sermons extolling Gibson, one of the sermons being advertised as "A Modern Crusader Against Graft, Booze, Boodle and Sin."

Accepting every invitation, Gibson spoke at churches, mass meetings, clubs and luncheons of business men's organizations. Brennan declared that the commissioner was showing signs of weakening on his vow that he would not become a candidate for mayor under any circumstances.

"You mark my words," he said to John. "Some of these days Gibson will announce himself as a candidate. He'll say that he has been persuaded that he would be failing to perform his full duty unless he heeded the call. He'll excuse himself from his stand that he had no political ambitions by saying that when he undertook his crusade he had no thought of ever becoming a candidate."

"What about the \$1,000 he told us he'd give to charity the moment he announced himself

as a candidate for any public office?" asked John.

"We'll see that he turns it over to the Children's hospital if it's the last thing we do," said Brennan, smiling.

At a moment when he was the most conspicuous man in the city, Gibson disappeared. Brennan and John joined the reporters of other Los Angeles newspapers in a night and day search for the missing commissioner, but, as it had been when Gibson disappeared before he foiled "Red Mike" in his attempted wreck of the "Lark," no trace of him could be found.

Gibson had not been missing for more than twenty-four hours before a tidal wave of crime swept the city. In a single night there were a score of robberies, holdups, burglaries and bandit raids. The gamblers and handbook agents resumed their business, women were attacked on the streets, bootleg liquor flowed like a river and pickpockets victimized a dozen men and women. The sudden resumption of unlawfulness, far more severe than it had ever been, caught the police unprepared and only a few arrests were made.

Brennan and John sought out Murphy.

"Da 'Gink' has canceled his orders and told da boys to go to it strong," Murphy told them. "He gave da word da day after this bird Gibson ducks out."

"Two and two make four," commented Brennan. "Gibson goes out of town and Cummings gives orders to his gang to open up. Another slick trick. Gibson will come back in a few days and the 'Gink' will call them off again. Result, the people will believe that Gibson is the only man to keep the lid down in Los Angeles, that as soon as he leaves crime begins and as soon as he returns it stops. Oh, what a smart pair they are!"

John took time to analyze the situation and decided that the coordination of the moves of Gibson and "Gink" Cummings was more than a series of coincidences. He accepted, for the first time without reservation or qualification, the theory that there was an alliance between the commissioner and the underworld boss. The realization shocked him and he felt a hate for Gibson, the deceiver, surge through him. But he knew that this hate was engendered more by the fact that Gibson was misleading Consuello than that he was a political Judas, betraying his city for "Gink" Cummings' stolen silver.

In the midst of the excitement caused by Gibson's disappearance and the outbreak of crime, while fears were being expressed in some quarters that the commissioner had met with foul play at the hands of Cummings' "bashers," John heard from Consuello.

CHAPTER XV

THEY had luncheon together in a cozy booth of a sweet shop in Broadway. Consuello accepted his invitation to luncheon when she telephoned to him that she was downtown and wished to see him. Her first question over the phone was whether John had learned anything concerning Gibson's disappearance.

"I'm downtown for an hour or so and thought you might have heard something about Mr. Gibson," she said.

To P. Q. he explained that he might be away from the office for lunch longer than usual.

"An angle concerning Gibson's disappearance that may develop something," he said, hoping it would be sufficient.

"What is it?" demanded the city editor.

"Well, Miss Carrillo—you remember—Gibson's friend—called me and I invited her to have lunch with me," John answered.

"Hop to it," said P. Q.

Consuello was in sport costume, silk knit jacket, saucy white hat, white skirt, shoes and hose; a trim, dainty figure, cool and refreshing. He had a curious feeling that their meeting was somewhat clandestine.

"I thought you knew where Gibson went, but I refrained from calling you to ask," John said after they were seated in the booth.

"Why didn't you?"

"I didn't want you to become involved in this—business." He almost said, "This mess."

"And why not?"

"If I had called you and you had told me where Gibson was, the other reporters would not rest until they found out my source of information and you would be brought into the whole affair," he explained.

"I understand," she said. "Truly, though, I am beginning to worry. He gave me no hint that he even intended leaving the city and that is what puzzles me. Tell me, do you think there is any reason to fear that anything has happened to him?"

"It's very improbable," he assured her. His conviction that Gibson and "Gink" Cummings were allied caused him to have no apprehension concerning the commissioner's safety. "He'll be back in a few days."

"I do hope so," she said. "He is making such a success, isn't he?"

"Yes." He was reluctant to give the affirmation. He conquered an impulse to tell her, to warn her, that it was more than probable Gibson was not the man she believed him to be. He wondered what she would say if he

told her what had caused him to turn against Gibson.

"I am very, very proud and happy," she said. "If anything should happen to him I don't know what I would do."

The potentiality of the words, "If anything should happen to him," struck home hard on John.

"It would be—terrible," he said, avoiding her eyes.

"He has been so considerate, so good," she said. "I feel that I owe him so much I can never repay."

A decision flashed into his brain as she spoke. If the time ever came when enough evidence was obtained to expose Gibson, he would go to the commissioner and plead with him to renounce Cummings, for her sake. There might yet be a chance to save Consuello from the disillusionment that was approaching. The fearfulness of Gibson's perfidy was almost incomprehensible.

"I'm certain he does not think so," he said.

"Do you know what he is planning for me now?" she asked, and then, before he attempted to reply, she added, "He plans to restore the wealth of the Carrillos."

Her eyes sparkled as she spoke and she looked to him for his approval.

"Oil has been struck within a mile or so of

our ranch," she explained. "They have asked father to sell or lease and Reggie has taken charge of it for us. Father has placed the whole business in his hands; he has so much confidence in him. He gave him an option on the ranch property and Reggie hopes to dispose of it for enough to bring back our lost fortune to us. Isn't it wonderful?"

"It certainly is," he agreed. "The discovery of oil is the only get-rich-quick proposition that is above reproach. A person can be poverty stricken one day and a millionaire the next and no one suffers by his quick acquisition of wealth. Oil is a treasure of nature bestowed by fate and it is needless for me to add that I hope that fate is good to you."

"It's all so complicated and technical that I cannot grasp it and father never was a business man. That is why Reggie is handling it for us," she said. "A new well is being bored only a few hundred yards from the ranch and everything depends upon whether oil is struck there. If they find oil it is almost certain that there is oil on our place. If no oil is found, then, of course, the value of the ranch diminishes."

"Oil, like gold, they say, is where you find it," John said.

"And so is happiness—where you find it," Consuello said. "That is what comforts me."

Money does not necessarily bring happiness. Even if it turns out that no oil is found I can still be happy. I am happy now and why should I let anything like the loss of wealth, that never came to me, disappoint me?"

Their luncheon finished, they walked to the street, where John found that the automobile placed at Consuello's disposal by Gibson—he was certain of that now—was waiting for her.

"Back to the studio and work again," she said. "I'm so glad we were able to meet, today. I have enjoyed it more than you know. When Reggie returns we must arrange a dinner party—the three of us. And before long you and your mother must come out to the ranch. I haven't forgotten that."

Her parting words brought back to John the bitter thought of his mother's intolerant prejudice against Consuello as he returned to the office.

He stopped at the city editor's desk to tell P. Q. that his meeting with Consuello had failed to develop a single clew to Gibson's whereabouts.

"Nothing doing," he reported.

"What do you mean, nothing doing?" asked P. Q. Then he added:

"Gibson showed up about an hour ago."

"He's back?" asked John.

"Back again," confirmed the city editor. "Says he only went away to rest up. Claims he went some place where he received no word from Los Angeles and didn't know crime had opened up again."

"What's he going to do about it?"

"Oh, he came through with just about what was expected," said P. Q. "Said he'd get right to work and put a stop to it. Blamed it all on the mayor and Sweeney. Says it's further proof that the police department is rotten."

The last edition that night carried the banner-line, "Gibson Returns to Stop Crime Wave."

Brennan and John sought Murphy, but being unable to locate him, had dinner downtown and continued their search during the evening. An hour before midnight they met him as he was returning to his room.

"Well, what's the word?" asked Brennan.

"I got what you're lookin' for," Murphy said. "Da 'Gink' has called off da boys again. He passes out da word dat dere's to be nuttin' doin' tonight, tomorrow night or until he says 'go.'"

"When did he give these orders, before or after Gibson came back?" asked Brennan.

"After," replied Murphy. "And there'll be nuthin' doin', see?"

"All right, Murphy. Keep on the lookout and drop in tomorrow and we'll fix you up for this."

"I gotcha," said Murphy.

"Three and three make six," said Brennan to John as they left Murphy at the door of his rooming house. "Gibson goes away and the 'Gink' opens things up, Gibson comes back and he shuts down again. That's how they make it appear that they are enemies and that Gibson is the only man who can keep the town closed."

That night the crime wave stopped as suddenly as it began. There was not a robbery, holdup or ordinary theft reported to the police. The same order that prevailed when the "Gink" first decreed a "lay-off" prevailed and Gibson issued a triumphant statement to the reporters for the first editions in the morning.

"It demonstrates what little fear bandits and crooks have for the police under Chief Sweeney," a part of the statement read. "It shows that the administration is so inefficient and corrupt that law and order must be enforced by citizens instead of by the officials whose duty it is to keep the lid down in Los Angeles."

Another avalanche of resolutions praising Gibson followed the publication of this statement. The mayor was hotly condemned for his failure to remove Chief Sweeney at Gib-

son's request and the commissioner was hailed as a man whose very name was enough to intimidate criminals and whose presence in the city was enough to keep outlawry and banditry at a minimum. One prominent citizen demanded that the mayor resign and that Gibson be appointed in his place by acclamation.

Brennan, John and P. Q. held another conference with the publisher. It was decided that while the evidence before them—John's experience in the Spring street raid and Murphy's information concerning "Gink" Cummings' moves in opening and closing the city while Gibson was in and out of it—was enough to convince them all that there was an alliance between Cummings and the commissioner, they lacked sufficient ammunition to "break" the story and expose the perfidious plot.

"Just a little more information, boys, something to show meetings between Gibson and Cummings or communications between them and we'll be ready to open fire," said the publisher.

A week later Gibson summoned Brennan and John to his office.

"How are you, boys?" he asked smiling. "I called you up here because I have something to give you."

He handed them a slip of paper. It was a check—his personal check—for \$1,000. The

space where the name of the recipient should appear was blank.

"This means——" began Brennan.

"It means that I'm a candidate for mayor," said Gibson. "Remember, I promised you I'd donate \$1,000 to charity the minute I became a candidate for any public office. What shall it be?"

"The Children's hospital," said Brennan.

Gibson seated himself at his desk and wrote in the name, blotted it carefully and tossed it toward them on the table.

* * * * *

The formal announcement of Gibson's candidacy, which he gave to Brennan and John immediately after turning over to them the check for \$1,000, made out to the Children's hospital, followed the lines foretold by Brennan when he predicted the commissioner's entry in the mayoralty race.

He declared he became a candidate at the persistent urging of organizations and individuals who had convinced him that he would deliberately evade a duty and service he owed the city if he refused. He reiterated his charges against the mayor and the administration, asserting that conditions as he found them in the city government were an intolerable disgrace.

His campaign committee, chosen a few days after he announced his candidacy, included the names of seventy-five per cent of the prominent and respected men and women of the city, as well as clubs and organizations representing the churches, civic improvement associations, manufacturers, business men and thousands of citizens. The Church Federation and the Ministerial Union, those two great bodies working always for the welfare of the city, gave him unqualified indorsements. The best people of the city advocated his election.

Gibson's nominating petition was completed in less than a week. The rapidity of the completion of the petition was viewed as a criterion of the respective strength of the commissioner and of the mayor, whose supporters encountered considerable difficulty in obtaining signatures. It was three weeks before the mayor's petition could be got ready for filing.

With the primary election two months away the candidates began their campaigns at once. Gibson was everywhere, addressing meetings night and day. The enthusiasm with which he was received surpassed that ever given to any candidate in Los Angeles. Daily he was paraded through the downtown section of the city by cheering admirers. "Gibson for Mayor" banners and cards decorated the entire city. From their pulpits the ministers

urged his election and took up his attack upon the administration. He was given credit unanimously for having clamped the lid down in Los Angeles tighter than it had ever been and he was acclaimed as a "fighting man" because of his duel with "Red Mike" and his personal leadership of the officers who raided the Spring street handbook makers.

The mayor was without ammunition to return Gibson's crossfire of charges against the administration. He was deserted, except for a few loyal supporters, who struggled vainly to stem the tide of popular favor as it swung to Gibson's side.

Gibson scored heavily three weeks after his campaign was opened by hurling charges that "Gink" Cummings was contributing to the mayor's campaign fund and placing his sinister strength at his disposal to aid him to be re-elected. Astounded by his opponent's audacity, the mayor sent for Brennan and John. His mild blue eyes were blazing and he chewed vigorously at his cigar.

"I'm licked, boys, unless I do something soon," he said. "I have to play a waiting game, but I can't afford to wait too long. I can't come out with the charge that Cummings and Gibson are plotting to steal the city. I haven't enough evidence. People would think I am crazy. As it is, he's getting away with

everything. If the primary was tomorrow he'd snow me under."

"He's pulling all the tricks in the bag," admitted Brennan.

"And I have nothing to come back at him with," the mayor complained.

"Why don't you fire him from his position as police commissioner?" suggested Brennan.

The mayor stopped short on the invisible path he had been pacing back and forth across his office.

"Brennan," he said, "I thought you had more sense than to suggest a thing like that. What reason could I give for firing him?"

"Say it's for the good of the service, that's all."

"And give him a chance to wail that I fired him because I am afraid of him, that I did it in desperation to save myself. Why, it would give him 10,000 votes of sympathy. No, Brennan, I must get something real to show that Gibson and 'Gink' Cummings are partners."

He turned and walked to the window, placing his hands on both sides of it, and leaned forward, his arms supporting him as he looked down into the busy traffic on Broadway. It was a position similar to that he had taken when John first met him, when he vowed to expose Gibson's alliance with Cummings,

but the shoulders drooped and the outlines of his figure, silhouetted against the light streaming in the window suggested great bodily and mental weariness.

"Is it possible that I'm to go down to defeat, to disgrace, to ignominy, at the hands of such a despicable rascal?" he said, without turning, as though he was speaking to himself. "Is this to be my reward—my end? Are the people of my city to be led like blind sheep into a carnage of crime and graft?"

Above the roar of the traffic in the street below the strident voice of a newsboy, shouting his immature conception of the most important news in the latest editions of the afternoon papers, came up to them.

"Gibson says de mayor's de bunk?" he shrieked. "Just out—pa—p—er!"

The voice from the street broke the tense silence that had followed the mayor's soliloquy. He turned from the window quickly and strode back to his desk and the suggestion of weariness dropped from him like a cloak and he emerged, alert, taut, energetic, in fighting trim.

"This won't do," he snapped, "this standing around and feeling sorry for myself. If I'm going down to defeat I'm going down fighting and when the day comes that the people discover what a hypocrite and crook this man

Gibson is, they'll remember, at least, that I fought him to the last.

"And I'm not licked yet, not by a damn sight. I'm going to plug right along and before another month passes I'm going to show this crook up if it's the last thing I do on earth."

"That's more like it," approved Brennan. "I've been in a few forlorn hope fights before and have seen the impossible happen, in fact, helped it happen."

"I'm depending on you more than anyone else," said the mayor. Turning to John he added: "And you, too, Gallant."

"The fault of crooks—and we're dealing with crooks—is that they can't think straight, all the time," said Brennan. "They always make a slip, some time. I've never known it to fail. No matter how smart a crook is, he always makes one mistake. He can't help it. It's because he's a crook and can't think straight. It's up to us to see that we don't overlook the mistake that Gibson and the 'Gink' will make."

"Let's hope they make it soon enough," said the mayor. "The primary is only five weeks away and if Gibson is to be exposed it must be within the next four weeks at the latest."

"I don't agree with you fully in that," said Brennan. "It might be a good idea, if we get

what we're looking for, to hold off until a few days before the election so that Gibson won't have enough time to reach the entire city with the story he'll frame up to come back with."

"We won't worry about that until we find enough to blast Gibson and Cummings once and for all," the mayor said. "I have men working night and day trying to link the two together. I have tried fairly and honestly to discover where Gibson obtained the money he has. He was broke, flat broke, about the time I was elected and suddenly he had all the money he required. Where it came from I can't find out. There is only one conclusion that I can see and that is that Cummings gave it to him; just as I have contended from the start."

Brennan and John saw Murphy regularly, meeting him at least once a day, hoping each time that he would bring them the information they sought. But he had little to tell them except that Cummings was enforcing his order that there should be no crime in the city. One night he brought them a story of how a rebellious gangster becoming restless, had planned to commit a robbery despite the "Gink's" prohibitory order and had been promptly "beaten up" by Cummings' thugs.

A week after their last conference with the mayor, Brennan and John received a telephone

message from Gibson's secretary, who told them that the commissioner wanted them to see him at his office immediately.

"Another grandstand stunt, I'll bet," Brennan speculated as they hurried to Gibson's office. "It's about time for one."

Gibson greeted them as affably as ever. As they entered his office he closed and locked the door behind them.

"Well, boys," he said, "how do you think my campaign is coming?"

"You're going strong," replied Brennan, truthfully.

"And how is my friend, the mayor?"

"He isn't ready to concede defeat yet," Brennan said. "He realizes, though, that you're gaining ground on him every day, or rather increasing the lead you had at the start."

Gibson laughed.

"He had his chance," he said. "I gave him warning, although I believe I don't have to tell you again, that I had no idea of ever running against him when he appointed me a commissioner. By the way, why doesn't he fire me?"

"What for?" asked Brennan.

"Oh, I see, he figures it would hurt him more than do him good," concluded Gibson. "Well, perhaps he's right. But I didn't send for you boys to talk politics. I have some-

thing I think will develop into a story for you, a real story, not the stuff my publicity man hands out."

"What is it?"

Gibson smiled and shook his head.

"I can't tell you now," he said. "Be here tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock and you can be in on the whole business. I don't expect there'll be any shooting, but you might as well bring guns if you have them."

"Another 'Red Mike'?" asked Brennan.

Gibson smiled again.

"Be here and see," he said, inexplicitly.

CHAPTER XVI

WITH Benton, the photographer, who performed his jig dance to the rhythm of "Gunga Din" when he was told he faced another adventure, Brennan and John were in Gibson's office before 10 o'clock the next morning. They found Gibson alone in his inner office.

"No 'make-up' this time, eh?" asked Brennan, recalling, by inference, Gibson's unkempt costume on the night he "shot it out" with "Red Mike" and saved the "Lark" from destruction.

"Not necessary," replied the commissioner. "Speaking of 'make-up' reminds me, Gallant, that Miss Carrillo asked me to tell you that she hasn't forgotten about our dinner party." It was the first time that Consuello's name had been mentioned by either of them since that afternoon at the studio when Gibson had told John of their engagement.

"It would be unlike her if she had forgotten," said John, ready to let Gibson infer what he might from the words. He noticed that Brennan was looking at him curiously.

"Suppose we set it for the evening of the day I'm elected mayor," said Gibson, smiling.

Over Gibson's shoulder John saw Brennan drop his right eyelid in a slow wink.

"That suits me," he replied. As Gibson turned toward his desk John returned Brennan's wink.

"Now, boys, let's get down to business," Gibson said as he turned back to face them, a paper in his hand. "Here's the story. I'm going to arrest one of 'Gink' Cummings' lieutenants. The man I'm after is 'Big Jim' Hatch, a notorious bunko swindler, and I've got him cornered but he doesn't know it.

"Hatch is Cummings' pal. They have known each other for years and worked together. 'Big Jim' is one of the cleverest bunko men in the country, so clever that he has been indicted only once, although he has swindled victims out of hundreds of thousands of dollars. That indictment was returned against him in New York several months ago and he fled to Los Angeles, arranging with 'Gink' Cummings to operate here and receive protection.

"This paper you see is a telegraphic warrant from New York for Hatch's arrest. I communicated with the New York authorities as soon as my detectives found that he was in the city and told me he was wanted in the East. They have trailed him day and night. The place where he is living is surrounded now

by my men and deputy sheriffs who are waiting for me before making the raid and arresting him. Now, if you're ready, we'll go and you can ask me any questions you want on the way."

He led them to an automobile parked in front of the office building. A liveried chauffeur sat at the wheel. John saw it was the machine that Consuello had said had been placed at her disposal by "a friend." He wondered why she never explained to him that it was Gibson's car. Gibson took the seat beside the chauffeur, while John, Brennan and Benton took the tonneau seats. The machine whirled away from the curb.

"Any questions?" asked Gibson over his shoulder.

"You've told us everything we need to know now," replied Brennan.

As Gibson turned back to face the road before them John glanced toward Brennan interrogatively. Brennan shook his head doubtfully as if he was puzzled by this new move by the commissioner.

"I can't figure it out—yet," he whispered.

In twenty minutes, at Gibson's order, the chauffeur stopped the automobile at a corner in West Eleventh street.

"We'll stop here and walk the rest of the way, it's only half a block," explained the

commissioner. "To drive up to the house would give them warning."

"Big Jim's" house was in the middle of the block. It was square, of two stories and set well back from the street. The blinds were down in all of the windows and it had a deserted appearance. Out of range of sight from any of the windows Gibson met a group of deputy sheriffs and his private detectives, one of whom stepped forward to address him.

"He's in there, all right," the detective said. "We trailed him in last night and he hasn't put his nose out of doors since. What are your orders, Mr. Commissioner?"

"Who has the search warrant?" Gibson asked.

"I have it," replied one of the deputy sheriffs. "I figured we might have to go in after him."

"Is the back of the house guarded?" Gibson demanded.

"Four men are there and four others posted at the sides," he was told.

"Good! Let's go then; I'll lead the way," said Gibson.

He strode quickly toward the house and up the walk to the front door, followed by the detectives, the deputies, Brennan, John and the camera man. John had a peculiar sinking feeling as he realized what open tar-

gets they were as they approached the house if "Big Jim" opened fire on them from behind the blind of one of the windows facing the street.

Gibson rapped sharply on the door and they waited tensely for a response. The officers' right hands were on the handles of their automatics and revolvers. There was no response to Gibson's rap. He clenched his fist and hammered loudly on the solid panel of the door. Again no response.

"You're certain he is inside?" demanded Gibson.

"Absolutely, Mr. Commissioner," assured the detective. "He's probably at the door now."

Gibson stepped to one side of the door and the others stepped back also.

"Open the door or we'll break it down," commanded Gibson, shouting.

A man's voice answered from behind the door.

"What do you want?" it asked.

"Open the door," said Gibson, ignoring the question.

A key clicked in the lock and the door opened. Two of the deputies sprang on the threshold beside Gibson, their automatics in their hands.

"Put 'em up!" they said sharply.

A large, florid-faced man, wearing an expensive house coat, with an expression of a respectable citizen highly outraged at what was before him, lifted his hands above his head.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded indignantly.

"There's no use pretending injured innocence, Hatch," said Gibson coolly. "We have a search warrant and a warrant for your arrest from New York."

The two deputies with drawn guns searched Hatch for a concealed weapon, patting his pockets, which they found empty. As they stepped back "Big Jim" dropped his hands to his side and smiled.

"Very well, Mr. Gibson," he said obligingly. "Do your stuff."

John was startled to hear Hatch call Gibson by name. Nothing had been said that even hinted of the commissioner's identity. The search warrant was handed Gibson.

"Do you want me to read this?" he asked.

"Don't trouble yourself," replied Hatch. "All I ask is that you don't tear things to pieces in here. Mrs. Hatch is with me and I don't want her to be bothered."

"All right, boys, be quick about it," ordered Gibson, sending the officers to search the house, "and don't disturb Mrs. Hatch unless it's necessary."

As the private detectives and deputies left them, Benton stepped forward with a request that Gibson and Hatch pose for a photograph.

"You brought them with you, eh, Gibson?" said Hatch. Then to the photographer he added: "I'll accommodate you under one consideration."

"Say it," requested Benton.

"That you leave Mrs. Hatch out of this," said "Big Jim."

The photographer looked to Brennan for an answer to this proposal.

"Go ahead, Benton," Brennan agreed, "we won't bother Mrs. Hatch."

While Benton was photographing Gibson and Hatch, John observed the bunko swindler more closely. To all outward appearances "Big Jim" might have been any one of the well-to-do business men one sees daily on the downtown streets. His hair was gray with a touch of white at the temples, his complexion ruddy. On the little finger of his plump, soft hand he wore a diamond ring in which the gem was the size of a pea. It was obvious that his suit was the work of a high-priced tailor. He had frank blue eyes that had a guileless expression and there were no criminal characteristics in the shape of his head, the position of his ears and the contour of his lips.

"I suppose you'll want me to go back with you," Hatch said to Gibson after Benton had made his final flashlight picture of them.

"As soon as the search is completed," assented the commissioner. "Tell me, Hatch, what about this New York job?"

"Big Jim" drew a cigar from his vest pocket, clipped off the end of it with a snap of his teeth and lighted it with a match. He puffed at the cigar, looked at it critically and smiled before he answered.

"You can speak about that to my lawyer," he said.

In pairs the deputies and detectives returned from their search of the house empty-handed.

"Nothing worth taking," they reported.

They prepared to leave, Hatch donned a suit coat and put on his hat. As they started toward the door John was in the rear. He was about to step over the threshold to join the others outside when a hand touched his arm. He turned and faced a girl, a very pretty girl, he thought, with large blue eyes, golden hair and petite figure.

"Are you a reporter?" the girl asked.

"Yes," he replied, mystified.

"Then please come back here, tonight, I have something to tell you."

The door closed and he was outside again.

* * * * *

It was not until after Hatch had been lodged in the county jail to await the arrival of officers from New York and Brennan had written the story of Gibson's arrest of the swindler that John revealed that the girl, whom he presumed was Mrs. Hatch, had asked him to return to the house that night. The arrest of "Big Jim" was the outstanding local news story of the day. Gibson issued another statement in which he emphasized that Hatch was one of "Gink" Cummings' men, who completely escaped the notice of Chief Sweeney's "inefficient" detectives.

When Brennan had handed to P. Q. the last sheet of his story of Hatch's arrest John told him how the girl had stopped him at the door and asked him to return.

"Great!" exclaimed Brennan. "I can't figure out Gibson's game in arresting 'Big Jim.' She'll probably be able to give us the tip."

"I wonder what she wants to tell me," said John.

"Tell US, you mean," Brennan amended. "You don't think you're not going to take me along with you, do you?"

A few minutes after 8 o'clock that evening John and Brennan returned to the scene of

their adventure of the afternoon. John rapped on the door and the girl spoke to them without opening it.

"Who is it, please?" she asked.

"It's the reporter you spoke to this afternoon," John said, and the door swung open. The girl stood with her hand on the knob. She glanced inquiringly toward Brennan.

"My partner," John explained.

"Come in," she invited, with a friendly smile.

She waited until they had entered and then closed the door behind them, locking it carefully. Without speaking she led them into a sitting room, artistically furnished, lighted only by a rose-shaded table lamp. She motioned them to a deep-cushioned davenport and seated herself in a chair under the light from the lamp.

There was no doubt about it, she was pretty! Her blonde hair shone in the light and the shadows about her eyes added to their beauty. Her face was round and piquant, her lips a deep crimson and tiny. Her one-piece dress on which beads sparkled, exposed a delicately rounded throat and slender white arms. Her hands were small and white and her fingernails were highly polished. Sheer silk stockings and neat, expensive shoes. A hint of cheapness about her; perhaps it was the

unnatural thinness of the delicately arched eyebrows, John thought; or perhaps the shortness of her skirt; but she was pretty!

"I suppose you understand that I am Mrs. Hatch?" she said.

They nodded.

"Now," she continued, "can you give me some assurance that you are really reporters and not detectives."

They produced their press badges which she examined under the light.

Apparently satisfied, she looked at them for a moment and then spoke.

"I want you to help me," she said; "help me and my husband."

"If there is any legitimate way we can help you, we will," Brennan assured her.

"I will begin at the beginning and tell you everything," she said. "When I have finished you can tell me what you can do for me.

"In the first place, I am speaking to you because my husband is afraid to say anything. He does not know that I am going to tell you this, but I am doing it to save him, because"—she hesitated—"I love him.

"Jim was indicted back in New York and came here to escape arrest. We arrived here five months ago. Whether Jim is guilty of what he is charged with in New York is for him to say. All I know is that he was

indicted and that we came to Los Angeles to escape the officers.

"We came here because Jim was a friend of 'Gink' Cummings and he thought that Cummings would protect him. Jim saw Cummings soon after we reached the city and Cummings greeted him like a long lost brother. He said that we could hide in Los Angeles and be reasonably sure that the New York officers would never learn we were here.

"A month after we came here we ran out of money and Jim decided to get to work again. You can guess how Jim planned to work. I need not tell you more than that before another month went by he had the money. It wasn't as much as he had hoped for and we were disappointed. We knew that every time he went to work he not only risked new trouble, but identification as the man who was wanted in New York. That is why his—his jobs had to be few and far between. We planned to make every cent of the money last as long as we could.

"Of course, 'Gink' Cummings knew what Jim had done. When the job was completed he called Jim to his office and told him that he would have to split what money he had got with him. He told Jim that no one worked in Los Angeles without giving him at least a 10 per cent cut, for protection.

"Jim was surprised. He had figured that Cummings was his friend. He told Cummings that he could not afford to split with him and explained how it was, that he could not risk working often and had to make his money last. He thought that this explanation would satisfy the 'Gink,' but it didn't.

"They quarreled. Cummings told Jim that he could not work in Los Angeles or stay here unless he 'came through.' Jim told him to go to h——. 'I'll tip New York that you're here,' Cummings told him. Jim told him to go to it, that he was in trouble and needed help instead of being compelled to put himself in danger.

"We were afraid that Cummings would follow out his threat and tip the New York police, so we left the city. We went to San Diego for a month and then, figuring that Cummings would believe we had left for good, came back to Los Angeles again. We were safe enough until a month ago when Jim did another job. He had to; we were broke. Cummings found out about it and came to see Jim. He came here, to this house. He sat where you are sitting now. While he was talking to Jim I was behind the curtain there and heard every word." She indicated portieres behind them.

"I won't repeat everything I heard, al-

though I could if it was necessary. Cummings said he had heard Jim had done another job and came to him for his split. 'You got away with it once, Jim,' he said; 'I didn't do anything but you've got to come through this time. I run things here in Los Angeles, let me tell you that. You're an old pal and all that and I'd like to let you alone, but I can't afford to. The boys are hollering because you're working without kicking in and for my own protection you've got to split.'

" 'And what'll you do if I don't?' Jim asks. 'Well,' says Cummings, 'I could have you croaked.' When he said that I thought Jim was going to kill him right here, but he kept control of himself. 'Or,' says Cummings, 'I'll have you pinched for that New York job.' Jim smiled when he heard that. 'Who'll do the pinching?' he asked. 'One of your paid cops?' 'It'll be somebody bigger than a cop,' said Cummings."

John felt Brennan move forward on the davenport.

" 'Somebody bigger than a cop.' Are you sure he said that?" Brennan asked.

"Those were his words," Mrs. Hatch answered. " 'Who'll that be?' asks Jim. 'Never mind who it'll be,' says Cummings, 'you'll find that out when it happens. Now, I'm giving you your last chance, either come across or

go back and do your bit; what's it going to be?"

"I know Jim. I know he would rather have died than to have given in to Cummings. 'Nothing doing, "Gink,"' Jim says. 'All right, Jim,' says Cummings, 'don't ever say I didn't give you a chance.' Then he left.

"I was afraid. I begged Jim to split with Cummings and make the most of it. But he was stubborn. 'I'd rather go to the pen than split with that cur,' he says to me. So nothing more happened until today and you were here and saw it.

"Now, this is how I think you may be able to help us. You saw who it was who arrested Jim. It was Gibson, the police commissioner, who is running for mayor. Gibson must have been the man Cummings referred to when he said that it would be somebody bigger than a cop who would arrest Jim. Gibson could never have known anything about Jim unless Cummings told him. Gibson and Cummings must be working together, somehow. The only reason Jim was arrested was because he wouldn't split with Cummings and it's Gibson who arrests him. Can't you see the connection?

"Jim can tell you every word I've told you and a lot more and there should be some way of using it to aid him. I don't know how,

but there should be some way. If he told everything to the district attorney here, don't you think it might help him a little? You see, Cummings wants him sent back to New York as soon as possible so he won't start talking. He won't say anything about what Jim has done here because he wants him out of the state.

"I thought that if Jim would tell his story to the district attorney or to some newspaper it might be arranged to have some recommendation for leniency for him when he goes back to New York. Or, he might be able to have the charge back there dropped and get immunity out here."

She paused. There was a tense silence until she spoke again, softly.

"You see," she said, "I love Jim and he loves me. We had decided, after this experience with Cummings, to go straight. Jim told me that he would work the rest of his life to pay back whatever he had taken wrongfully and we would be happy together. We wouldn't have to live in fear and the day would come when we could hold up our heads and have a little home and—and—children."

John thought he saw tears in her eyes as she ended the sentence.

"I have trusted you in telling you this," she said. "I feel that I can trust you. Tell me,

please tell me, can anything be done with what I've told you?"

She looked toward them pleadingly, anxiously. Brennan was sitting on the edge of the davenport, his body bent forward, his elbows on his knees, gazing intently at the girl.

"A crook can't think straight all the time," he said, quietly. "'Gink' Cummings has made his mistake."

CHAPTER XVII

THE story told by Evelyn Hatch—Evelyn was her given name— was twice repeated by John and Brennan the next day, first to P. Q. and then to the publisher of their paper. It was decided that Hatch's own story should be obtained and, if possible, put in affidavit form. Following their conferences with P. Q. and the "chief" they went directly to the county jail where "Big Jim" was brought down from his cell at their request.

He greeted them genially, offering them cigars as they led him to a quiet corner of the reception room.

"I always try to be a good scout with newspaper men," Hatch said, smiling. "I've had considerable experience with reporters and I've always found them square and fair. And, without speaking personally, of course, I can tell you that you reporters do more to eradicate crime than all the police in the country."

"Hatch," said Brennan, ignoring the compliment, "we've had a talk with your wife."

"You promised me you'd let her alone," said "Big Jim" sharply.

"We never spoke to her until she told us she wanted to see us," John put in. "As I

was leaving the house after you were arrested she stopped me and asked me to come back, saying she had something to tell me."

The anger that had blazed in Hatch's eyes when he suspected them of violating their promise softened to tenderness.

"Poor kid," he said, "it's a hard jolt for her." He hesitated a moment and then added, "She's the only one in the world who really cares what becomes of me. Well, what did she have to say to you?"

"You can guess, can't you?" asked Brennan.

"I suppose I could, but I'm not going to," returned Hatch.

"She wants to help you," said Brennan.

"You don't have to tell me that."

"What she told us she revealed with the sole thought of trying to help."

Drawing mild little puffs of smoke from his cigar "Big Jim" waited silently, thoughtfully, for Brennan to continue.

"She told us about your trouble with 'Gink' Cummings—the whole business." Brennan watched Hatch's face intently as he spoke. "And to prove it I'll repeat her story to us, exactly as she told it."

While Brennan was relating what Mrs. Hatch had told them "Big Jim" sat motionless in his chair, his head bowed on his chest.

John watched the ash in Hatch's cigar turning from a glowing red to a heatless gray. When Brennan finished Hatch spoke without raising his head.

"Poor little kid," he said, tenderly. He straightened up in his chair, tossed away his cigar and scrutinized Brennan keenly.

"Every word she spoke is the truth; every word of it, and, more," he said. "I've decided to take my jolt back in New York so I can get back to her as soon as I can. She'll wait for me, I know she will. Whether you can help me or not, I'll tell you everything."

John felt his heart jump in his breast.

"When?" asked Brennan quickly.

"Now," said Hatch.

"Shoot," said Brennan.

"There's no use going over what Evelyn told you again," said Big Jim, without a second's hesitation. "I'll swear to every word she said. But there's something she didn't tell you, because she didn't know it."

"Did you notice that I called Gibson by name when he arrested me?"

Brennan nodded.

"Well, where do you suppose I saw him to know him by sight?"

Without waiting for an answer, he snapped out:

"In 'Gink' Cummings' apartment!"

John discovered that he had been holding his breath. Gibson in Cummings' apartment! A thrill like a mild electric shock shot up and down his spine.

"The 'Gink's' apartment?" asked Brennan.

"That's the place," Hatch confirmed. "It was about a month ago. I can give you the exact day and hour later. I went to Cummings to try to settle things between us, without Evelyn knowing it. We were alone together when someone knocked on the door. Cummings answered it. As he left the room he pulled the door to close it, but it swung back open and I saw into the hallway.

"I saw Gibson enter. I didn't know who it was then and suppose it was pure curiosity that made me watch them. They talked for a minute and then Gibson started toward the door of the room I was in. As he did so, Cummings saw that the door was open and stepped over and closed it. That was all I saw.

"I heard Cummings say, 'Don't do this again.' When he came back he told me there could be no settlement between us except I split with him and I left. The next day I saw Gibson's photograph in a newspaper and it nearly knocked me off my chair. Just to make sure I hunted Gibson up and when I saw him I knew I couldn't have been mistaken.

Gibson was the man I saw in Cummings' apartment.

"I'm sure that Cummings doesn't realize that I saw Gibson that night. If he had known it he would never have had me arrested and yet I was afraid to threaten him with it. I thought that if I told him I had seen Gibson at his place he would have bumped me off, but now that I'm here in jail I have nothing to fear. He won't dare to tell the authorities about my jobs in Los Angeles because if he does he'll make my story stronger. Besides, all he knows is that I got the money. He doesn't know whom I got it from or when or how.

"That's my addition to Evelyn's story. That's how I knew it was Gibson when he stepped in to arrest me. You can see how it worked out. When I defied Cummings he arranged with Gibson to arrest me. He had Gibson do it because Gibson is his man and he wants the public to think that they are enemies. I'm telling you this because after I do my bit back in New York I'm going straight, with Evelyn. I'm going to pay back every cent I ever took from anyone and, perhaps, sometime we'll have a home and—what she said."

Overwhelmed mentally by the condemning information against Gibson which had been

given them by "Big Jim," John was startled by Brennan's first words after Hatch had stopped speaking.

"What a fat-head I am!" Brennan exclaimed.

Hatch's face showed that he shared John's surprise at Brennan's ejaculation.

"Oh, what a sap I am!" he continued. "Why, oh, why haven't we shadowed them? Why haven't we followed them night and day until we found them together? Why didn't one of us spot the 'Gink's' apartment?"

"You're lucky you haven't," Hatch put in. "You couldn't have gotten away with it. They probably would have killed you. Anyway, I doubt very much if they actually meet each other now. The 'Gink' warned Gibson when I saw them that he was not to 'do this again,' which meant he shouldn't come to the apartment."

"They're in communication with each other, somehow," said Brennan.

"There's the telephone, or they may be using the mails, or they may have a confidential agent, a go-between," Hatch suggested.

"I don't think the 'Gink' would take a chance with a go-between," said Brennan.

Before they left him to hurry back to the office, Hatch agreed to make an affidavit containing what he had told them, including the

portion of the story told by his wife, and had consented to allow them to obtain a sworn statement from Mrs. Hatch.

"There's only one thing wrong with what we got from 'Big Jim,'" Brennan said as they left the jail, "and that is that it comes from a man facing a term in the penitentiary. It's difficult for people to believe a confessed swindler like Hatch, although he's telling the truth. Even his wife's story would be received skeptically simply because she is his wife. Gibson has such a hold on the city, such a reputation for honesty and integrity, such influential support, that his mere denial of what Hatch says would be believed implicitly."

"But consider Hatch's story along with the framed-up Spring street raid and the information we have of how Cummings opened and closed the town to convince the people that Gibson is the only man who can stop crime," John argued.

"We must look at it from the reader's viewpoint," said Brennan. "It's the reader whom we have to convince. He wants facts, plain, hard facts. We have nothing to actually show that Cummings framed the Spring street raid in collusion with Gibson. We have nothing to actually show that the opening and closing of the city by Cummings was to build up a reputation for Gibson. All that is mere

inference, suspicion. And the weakness in Hatch's story is in the fact that he is a crook himself, although you and I know that he told us the truth."

"Then we haven't enough yet?" said John.

"I'm afraid not."

"But you said last night that Cummings had made his one big mistake."

"And I wasn't wrong when I said it. We don't have to take Hatch's story simply as it stands. It's up to us now to get corroboration enough to make it undeniable."

"How?"

"By finding someone who has seen Gibson visit Cummings' apartment, a janitor, a neighbor, the clerk at the desk, anyone."

"Suppose no one saw him."

"Then we must find out how they are communicating with each other. We can tap the telephone in Cummings' apartment and those at Gibson's office and home if it comes to that."

P. Q. and the "chief" upheld Brennan's judgment that Hatch's story needed more corroboration than that given by his wife and that the attack on Gibson, exposing him as a fraud, would have to be postponed until one more link was added to the chain of evidence against him. It was decided that Brennan and John should concentrate their endeavors in an

effort to discover the method of communication between Gibson and the "Gink."

* * * * *

That night John saw Consuello again and realized with a suddenness that shocked him that he loved her.

The tremendousness of his realization that he was in love with her frightened him, and yet he was gloriously happy. Exultant joy, a rapture faintly akin to the ecstasy that had thrilled him the first Christmas morning he could remember, gave a buoyancy to his brain, his heart, his soul. He knew that he had loved her from the moment he met her and regardless of what the future held for them he would go on loving her forever.

Returning to his desk after the conference in the "chief's" office on the story told by "Big Jim" Hatch, John found a sheet of copy paper stuck in the roller of his typewriter. That was the office boy's way of leaving memoranda of telephone calls for the reporters.

"Call Miss Carrillo at the studio," John read. He went immediately to the telephone booth.

"There will be a pre-view of the picture, my latest, here tonight and I thought you might like to see it," she said. "Reggie is so busy campaigning that he can't be here," she added.

"I would like it," he told her.

"Can you come?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Splendid," she said. "The pre-view will be at 7:30, but can't you get here earlier so we can have dinner together and talk?"

"At six, then," he suggested.

"At six," she assented.

He wondered why it was he felt relieved when she said that Gibson would not be there with them.

It was dusk when he reached the studio a few minutes before six. She had waited for him in her dressing room to which he was escorted by the maid.

"There's a little place a few blocks away where we always go for dinner when we're kept late," she said. "I discovered it myself. I delight in finding little out-of-the-way places to eat. Reggie can't understand it. He's uncomfortable every minute of the time we're there."

"You would have liked my father," he said. "Almost every week he treated mother and me by taking us to dinner at some genuinely picturesque place he had found. Sometimes it would be a little Spanish restaurant in Sonora Town, sometimes an Italian cafe in North Broadway and sometimes a French table de hote, which I liked best. Mother

was like you say Gibson is, uncomfortable every minute, but father and I enjoyed it immensely. One night, when mother wasn't with us, we had tamales at one of those wagon lunch places drawn up at the curb near the Plaza and lighted by a sputtering kerosene range and a lantern that gave it an appearance of being a ship's cabin. I'll never forget it."

"You miss your father greatly, don't you?" she said. The sympathy in her voice was like soothing music.

"Everything in me that amounts to anything I owe to him," he said.

They walked to the "little place around the corner," as Consuello referred to it. The dinner was served to them at a corner table in a spotlessly clean room of "Mother" Graham's cafe, which was only large enough to accommodate a dozen couples. The proprietress, "Mother" Graham, who took as much pride in her cookery as the chef of the most expensive cafe, greeted Consuello effusively.

"And how's my little darling, tonight?" she asked. "'Mother' Graham shall serve you herself, for it's not every night that I see your dear face."

The dinner was plain, appetizing home cooking; delicious brown chops, crisp cool

salad, fragrant coffee and hot rolls; berries and cream. Once John caught a glimpse of "Mother" Graham pointing out Consuello to a pop-eyed girl and her youthful escort as "Jean Hope."

"I am being envied," he said across the table.

"By whom?"

"By everyone who sees us. I do not blame them, for I am to be envied."

"Because you are with Jean Hope?" she smiled.

"Because I am with Consuello Carrillo," he answered. "I do not know Jean Hope yet. I am to meet her, tonight."

"You saw her before the camera," she reminded him.

"But never on the screen," he returned.

"And what if you don't like her?"

"My consolation will be that she is only a shadow, a make-believe."

"You are different," she told him, "and it's not because you lack imagination. Most everyone does not disassociate a film player from her shadow. They think of her always as the type or character in which they admire her most. To them she is always the same, always perfect, a picture, a memory. How disappointed those dream lovers would be if they

could suddenly be brought face to face with the player as she really is, with her little vanities and human frailties."

"Disappointed or disillusioned, which?" he asked.

"You are right," she replied, "they would be disillusioned rather than disappointed. There is a difference. For instance, I would be disappointed rather than disillusioned in Reggie if he should blunder and miss his opportunity of becoming mayor of Los Angeles."

Her words struck him like a blow. They brought to him the realization again that she faced a disillusionment of which she had no warning. How could he save her from it? Would she go on believing in Gibson? It would be like her to defend him until the last, to go with him to a place where his disgrace was not known and begin life all over again.

"Suppose," he said, watching her intently, "that it was not disappointment but disillusionment."

"You mean—in Reggie?" she asked, apparently unable to comprehend what he had said.

Unable to speak the word, he nodded. She laughed lightly and he forced himself to smile.

"I know him too well to ever be disillusioned," she said.

"Love, they say, is blind," he ventured.

"I know his faults as I do mine," she said slowly, "and love him for them. You see, we've known each other since we were children."

He could not reply. The awfulness of the truth dumbed him and an impetuous desire to protect her swept through him. But he was powerless, helpless. A wild idea of sacrificing his loyalty to his paper by warning Gibson of the impending exposure of his perfidy so that he might renounce "Gink" Cummings and be worthy of Consuello's love flashed in and out of his brain.

His silence seemed to mystify her. When she spoke it was as though she might have a vague premonition of his confused thoughts.

"But there's no need for my having an apprehension that he will blunder, is there?" she asked.

"We all make mistakes," he said, conscientiously trying to assure her. He realized, however, that his answer sounded evasive and fearful of further questioning he added, hastily, "His election is conceded by everyone."

They rose from the table. To "Mother" Graham, perched on a stool behind a cash register near the door, he paid for their dinner and they stepped out into the street. Night had descended quickly. The cool, re-

freshing breeze from the ocean that tempers the warmth of the day was coming in gently, caressingly, soothingly from the west, and worries fled away with it like dead leaves whisked from the trees.

During the pre-view, which lasted an hour and a half, John had but few chances to converse with Consuello. She was busy with Bonwit, the director, and a half dozen others whom John decided were the technicians whose business it was to revise the film before it was released. They sat grouped in a semi-circle and several times certain scenes were flashed on the screen repeatedly for closer observation.

The girl he saw on the screen was much more like Consuello in real life than the girl he had seen before the camera. The make-up that had transformed her features for her part in the picture was indiscernible on the screen and marvelously the real Consuello was before him. The "close-up" for which she had posed alone, holding the bouquet of daisies, was even prettier than it had been when she enacted it. He realized now what were the results sought by the camera men in shifting the reflectors. Like a halo, sunlight shone around her face, through the loose tresses of her hair, giving it an ethereal appearance.

So intently did he study every move, every expression of Consuello's on the screen that he

had completely overlooked the story of the photoplay. The scene in which the actor embraced Consuello and gazed fervently heavenward was far more impressive than it had been when it was enacted and the "close-up" of his features, over her shoulder, John decided was really an excellent bit of facial expression.

When the pre-view was completed and the lights were flashed on again in the small room, Consuello came directly to him.

"Now, what do you think of 'Jean Hope,' do you like her?" she asked.

"I adore her," he said, without restraint.

The almost timid look of incredulousness he remembered having noticed when he told her she was beautiful at the Barton Randolph lawn fete came into her eyes. For a fraction of a second they looked into each other's faces and something that she saw told her that his adoration was not only for the image of herself that he had seen upon the screen. She caught her underlip between her teeth and looked down.

"We can go now," she said, a note in her voice that he had never heard before.

They did not speak as they walked toward the gates of the studio and it was then he realized that he loved her. In that moment he was transported to an indescribable happiness. She seemed a fairy creature at his side, too beautiful to touch, too wonderful to speak to.

An automobile stopped beside them. Bon-wit, at the wheel, leaned out over the side.

"Can't I give you two a lift home?" he asked.

John looked toward Consuello and heard her say:

"No, thanks; it's only a few blocks home and we'll walk—it's such a—a—a glorious night."

CHAPTER XVIII

CONSUELLO was the first to speak as they passed through the studio gateway to the sidewalk overhung by the drooping branches of tall pepper trees.

"It's not far," she said.

The words awoke John from his enthrallment and she saw by his glance toward her that he did not comprehend their meaning.

"It's not far to the house," she explained. Not far! He wished it were miles away, that they might walk on together for hours.

"I could not bear being cramped up in an apartment," she added. "When it became necessary for me to find some place to live in Los Angeles, a dear friend—you must meet her—and I hunted up this little place for our home. It wasn't much to look at when we found it, but we have made it over to suit us and we have both grown to love it."

"Your friend—is she in pictures, too?" he asked.

"Betty is an artist," she replied. "She designs sets and costumes for pictures and she is wonderful. She knows everything about her work, more than anyone else in Hollywood, they say. She deserves all the credit for turning our little home into a dream place."

"You will miss her when——" he found himself unable to finish the sentence, "you are married."

"Yes," she said. "I'll miss her and our little home. Really, I don't believe I will know how to act if I become the wife of the mayor of Los Angeles. I have grown to detest formality, dances and dinners and receptions and things. If there is one thing Reggie and I will quarrel about that will be it. He has always been invited everywhere and he enjoys the niceness of conventionality."

He was glad that there was not complete compatibility between her and Gibson. It was selfish and wrong for him to rejoice that she and Gibson were not perfectly suited in their likes and dislikes and he knew it, but nevertheless it gladdened him.

"I nearly died of fright that day at the lawn fete, when I met you," he said. "I believe I would have done something disgraceful to that servant who was asking me to leave if you hadn't appeared."

"You told me you thought Reggie to be a villain," she reminded him, laughing. "You don't think him one now, do you?"

How close he came to telling her then what he had reason to believe Gibson actually was, a villain beyond all understanding, she never knew.

"No," he lied.

She stopped at a gateway formed by a gap in a hedge of spicy scented boxwood that paralleled the sidewalk.

"Here we are," she said, turning in.

He saw a rose-shaded light in the window of a small house set far back from the street.

"Betty is waiting for me," she explained.

"I want you to meet her."

On each side of the pathway leading back to the house was a rose garden with the bushes set at precise intervals. The rose garden ended half way back from the sidewalk. Before the house, for the entire width of the lot and a dozen paces deep, was closely cropped grass. Flat stones, set into the lawn like the footprints of an elephant, provided an artistic path to the door, which was massive in size and of unfinished stained oak. The flanges of the hinges were of beaten iron held in place by studded bolts. A quaint knocker was above the handle to the latch.

"You'll pardon me for a moment?" Consuello asked, opening the door and stepping inside, returning a moment later to hold it open for him to enter.

The room was exceptionally large, with rafters across the ceiling. At one end was a huge fireplace and rugs were scattered over a smooth but unpolished floor. Betty rose from

an easy chair as he entered. She had been reading. John saw that she was slender, dark-eyed, rather pretty.

"Betty, this is Mr. Gallant," said Consuello by way of an introduction.

"Consuello has spoken of you, often," said Betty, advancing with a friendly smile and an outstretched hand. Mentally John thanked her for the words. He knew instinctively that he would like her and that she would be a friend to him.

"Miss Carrillo has been more than kind to me," he said. "I often wonder why she is," he added, returning Betty's smile.

"She likes you," said Betty, with a frankness that startled him a little. He glanced toward Consuello and saw that she was regarding Betty with an amused look.

Betty moved toward a door at the side of the room.

"Will you care if I leave you?" she said. "Please do not think it rudeness. I have been doing a little studying which I must finish to-night and——"

"I'm intruding, I know," interrupted John.

"You're not," she remonstrated with the candidness that John found later was so engaging. Her smile overcame his temporary embarrassment. "I'll see you again, I'm sure," she added, nodding slightly before she stepped

into the other room, closing the door behind her.

"What do you think of our little home?" Consuello asked as he turned toward her. She was seated in the chair Betty had left.

"It's like you," he said, feeling free to take the chair near her. "It is so genuinely—beautiful." This time he felt no hesitancy in saying it.

"And what of it do you like best of all?" she asked quickly.

He looked around the room slowly until his eyes rested on a wide casement window opening out over a deep sill on which blood-red geraniums nestling in the rich green foliage of the plant, grew in a box. Faintly, against the skyline as he looked through this window he saw the curving outline of a hill. The window panes, swung inward, were divided into small squares by the crosspieces.

"That," he said, without turning his eyes from the window.

"I knew——." She hesitated. He glanced toward her inquiringly. "I knew you would," she said. "That is my window. The hill you see from it is my hill. Did you ever read the verse by Martha Haskell Clark that inspired the designing of that window?"

He shook his head. She rose and crossed to the window and stood framed to her waist-

line in the outer casement. She looked out into the night, toward "her" hill, the fingers of one hand touching the petals of one of the crimson blossoms. Softly she recited:

"Life did not bring me silken gowns,
Nor jewels for my hair,
Nor sight of gabled, foreign towns
In distant countries fair,
But I can glimpse, beyond my pane, a green
and friendly hill,
And red geraniums aflame upon my window-
sill.

"The brambled cares of everyday,
The tiny humdrum things,
May bind my feet when they would stray,
But still my heart has wings,
While red geraniums are bloomed against my
window-glass,
And low above my green-sweet hill the
gypsy wind-clouds pass.

"And if my dreamings ne'er come true,
The brightest and the best,
But leave me lone my journey through,
I'll set my heart at rest,
And thank Thee, God, for home-sweet things,
a green and friendly hill,
And red geraniums aflame upon my window-
sill."

He gazed into the empty fireplace as the words of the verse sang through his mind.

"But still my heart has wings," "Gypsy wind-clouds," "And if my dreamings ne'er come true . . . I'll set my heart at rest."

He mused over them. His heart had wings to soar high with his soul in the ecstasy of his new-found love. And if his dreaming never came true, could he set his heart at rest?

Or, her dreams, her expectation of happiness with Gibson—when they were shattered, could she set her heart at rest and thank her God for "home-sweet things," her "green and friendly hill, and red geraniums aflame upon her window-sill"?

He looked up from the ashes of the fireplace, where flames had sparkled to cheer and comfort her. She was still looking out toward her "green and friendly" hill and the listlessness of her outline told him that she, too, was musing. He longed to know her thoughts.

Very slowly she turned her face toward him. There was a suggestion of somberness in her eyes as she looked down at him.

"I arranged this window just for that," she said.

"Why did you know I would choose it as the part of the room I liked best?" he asked.

"Because I've found we both love the simple things, the 'home-sweet' things, the enduring things of life," she answered.

"Is that why you have been so kind to me?"

"Please don't think of it as kindness," she said. She was back in the chair she had left to stand beside the window. "That is why I have arranged to see you as often as I have, if that is what you mean."

An impulse overwhelmed his self-imposed restraint.

"If anything ever happens to cause you to have doubt in me," he said, earnestly, "will you try to believe that I did what I thought was right?"

The nature of his question, its suddenness, astonished her. She moved her lips to speak.

"Don't ask me why I asked you that," he said, "but promise me, promise me, that you'll do your best to think of me as doing what I believed was right."

"I'm bewildered, but you have my promise," she answered.

The clock on the mantel above the fireplace chimed midnight. He rose.

"I have been thoughtless," he said. "I had forgotten the time."

She walked with him to the door.

"Good-night," he said, "and thank you."

"Good-night," she said, dropping the hand she had given him to her side.

He strode out into the night. Subconsciously he waited for the door to close behind him.

Each step took him farther toward the street and yet he did not hear the click of the latch.

At the sidewalk he turned to look back.

She was standing, framed in the soft light shining through the doorway, looking out at him. He waved his hand. He saw her hand flutter and then the door closed.

"'Still my heart has wings,' " he repeated to himself as he turned away.

* * * * *

The primary election was only two weeks away. Gibson, with the powerful combination of organizations behind him, was swinging into the final lap of his campaign with unabated success. That he would snow the mayor under at the primary was conceded everywhere. Facing humiliation in the most decisive defeat in the history of the city the mayor's organization dwindled down to a few never-say-die supporters whose activities were almost laughable in the prospect of Gibson's overwhelming victory at the polls. To the list of organizations indorsing the police commissioner was added the Anti-Saloon league.

Seeking corroboration of the story told them by "Big Jim" Hatch, which they had in affidavit form from "Big Jim" and Mrs. Hatch, John and Brennan visited the downtown apartment house where "Gink" Cummings resided and where Hatch claimed to have seen Gib-

son. Cautiously they questioned the janitor, the clerk at the desk, the elevator boy and even the proprietor without success. None of them had ever seen a man answering Gibson's description enter the building.

"Probably the time Hatch saw Gibson at Cummings' apartment was the only time Gibson ever visited the 'Gink' there, and, because it was late at night, no one happened to see him," said Brennan. "It is beginning to look as though we'll have to tap either Gibson's or Cummings' telephone if the 'chief' wants to go that far."

Then, late one afternoon, John received a telephone call from Murphy.

"Meet me tonight at Second and Spring," said Murphy. "I got somethin' for ya, see?"

"Is it worth while?" asked John.

"I'm not sayin' nothin' now, see?" said Murphy. "Just be there at ten bells, see?"

"We'll be there," John told him.

"I wonder what he's stumbled across?" said Brennan when John informed him of their appointment to meet Murphy.

"I asked him and he wasn't sayin' nothin', see?" said John.

"Don't," pleaded Brennan, "you'll have me doing it."

That night at a few minutes of ten they were standing on the steps of the entrance to the

Bryson block when Murphy, his peaked cap pulled down far over his eyes and his coat collar turned up close around his throat, sidled up to them.

"What's the big idea of covering up your face, Murphy?" asked Brennan.

"I'm takin' no chances of gettin' 'made,' see?" Murphy answered. "Made," John remembered, was the slang of detectives for identification. When a person was "made" he was identified.

"Well, then, what's the program?" asked Brennan.

"I think I got them," Murphy replied.

"Got who?"

"De 'Gink' and dis bird Gibson."

"How?"

"Meetin' each other."

"The hell you say!" Brennan ejaculated.

"Have you seen them together?"

"Well if de bird I figure is Gibson is him, I got 'em, see?"

"Where?" demanded Brennan.

"De Gallant kid here knows de place," said Murphy. "Remember da room where ya got paid off when ya got pinched in de handbook raid?"

John nodded.

"Dat's da joint."

John recalled the windowless cubby-hole in

the rear of the Spring street saloon where "Slim" Gray, Cummings' lieutenant, had returned to him the \$10 he had put up in bail and \$10 as compensation for having been on hand when Gibson made the sensational raid.

"Murphy," said Brennan, "just start in at the beginning and tell us about this and please don't put any more 'sees' into it than you absolutely have to."

"Well, here's da stuff. Da other night I'm comin' in late from da fights at Vernon, see? I'm between Main and Spring, see? when I make a bird standin' all by his lonesome at da entrance to da alley. Dis bird is kinda nervous and jumpy-like, see? and I figure he might be a stick-up. I ain't got no jack with me, so I keeps on walkin' right at him, see?

"Well, I'm about twenty feet from him, see? when I make another bird crossin' tha street toward him. When I get up to them, see? they're just about to meet, see?"

"Murphy," interrupted Brennan, "for heaven's sake forget those 'sees.' "

Murphy grinned and went on.

"Well, just as dese two birds meet I get a flash of da mug of da guy dat crosses da street, se——"

"Go ahead, say 'see' all you want to," said Brennan impatiently.

"I get a flash of da bird's mug, see? and I make him, see? It was da 'Gink,' see? I try to make da other bird, but he turns into the alley quick, see? Well, I keep right on my way and then come back, see? I stick my nut around da corner of da building and watches them. They hurry down da alley, see? and ducks in a door.

"Well, I'm not takin' no chances of gettin' plugged, see? so I don't follow them. I just hang around for an hour and waits for them to come out again, see? When they come out da door I spot it and duck back into a shadow. They pass me so close I could a touched 'em, see? but it was dark and I don't get no chance to make da bird with da 'Gink.' Well, they go up toward Spring street and I trail them far enough to see them get in a bus, see?"

"What did this fellow with the 'Gink' look like?" asked John, quickly.

"I'm tellin' ya I didn't get no chance to make him," said Murphy. "All I'm able to get is that he's tall and black-haired, see?"

"What kind of a hat did he wear?"

"Straw."

"It's Gibson, all right," snapped Brennan. John's nerves tingled throughout his body. A picture of Gibson as he was when he first saw him flashed into his mind. He saw the com-

missioner's perfectly moulded hair, black and shiny; he saw his neat straw hat in his lap.

"Dat's what I figured," said Murphy. "So last night I find a place near da door I seen them go in and waits for them, see? I wait all night, but nobody shows up. I figures dat if it's Gibson meetin' da 'Gink' you boys will want to be in on it, see? I know dat joint like it's my own, see?"

"We see, Murphy, perfectly," interposed Brennan.

"So, I know there's a basement, see? While I'm waitin' I take a chance and work da lock on da basement door, see? It's a padlock and I cop it, see? This mornin' I get a friend to make a key for it, see? and this afternoon I slip it back where it belongs."

"Murphy," said Brennan, "you're a wonder. Where's the key?"

Murphy reached into his pocket and produced it. Brennan glanced at his watch.

"What time was it when you saw Cummings and this other fellow?" he asked.

"I figure it was between twelve and one," replied Murphy.

"Good!" Brennan exclaimed. "It's half past ten now. We'll get down there and get the lay of the land in that basement. They may go there again, tonight."

They walked rapidly toward the alley-way where Murphy had recognized "Gink" Cummings when he met the man they suspected was Gibson. Spring street was beginning to become deserted for the night. Little groups of men and women from the theaters waited at the corners for street cars. A peanut and candy peddler pushed his cart wearily along the street, close to the curb, plodding his way home. The proprietor of an open front fruit stand struggled with the folding iron fence pulled across the entrance to his store for protection of his wares until morning.

They turned into the alley-way in single file, Murphy leading, Brennan next and John acting as a voluntary rear guard. The narrow alley, like the bottom of a canyon with walls of brick, was darker than the streets. In the middle of the block Murphy seemed to disappear into the earth. Then Brennan dropped from sight. John was startled momentarily until he found that they had descended a steep stairway, covered with trash and old papers. Murphy unlocked the padlock and the door creaked inward on rusty hinges. They sidled through it, fearful that the squeaking might betray them.

Inside it was pitch dark. John was unable to see the faces of Brennan and Murphy, although their elbows touched.

"I'll wait here and keep a lookout," said Murphy. "Here's a torch and go easy with it." He handed Brennan an electric pocket torch.

"Murphy, you're a wonder, see?" said Brennan as he flashed on the light, pointing it to his feet as he moved slowly forward.

A pungent odor of stale beer from empty kegs piled against the walls mingled with that damp smell peculiar to underground places. Cobwebs tickled their faces as they walked through the seldom used path between the kegs and packing boxes. The small arc of light from the electric torch danced ahead of them as John and Brennan inspected their surroundings. At the end of the basement for a length of twenty-five yards back from the wall under the street, they found a space cleared of the boxes and kegs. On one side was a broad, steep stairway leading up to a trapdoor in the floor above.

They could hear the voices of men in the room over their heads and a scuffling of feet that told them the soft drink and lunch establishment, into which the old saloon had been converted, had not been closed down for the night. Their inspection completed, they returned to Murphy, standing guard at the doorway on the alley. After Murphy had snapped the padlock shut they crawled up to the alley

again and he led them to a space between two buildings less than four feet in width, into which they crowded themselves.

"We can spot them from here when they go by, see?" Murphy explained.

CHAPTER XIX

MIDNIGHT.

For more than an hour they had remained in their cramped hiding place, waiting. Brennan smoked innumerable cigarettes while they talked in whispers. A policeman had walked through the alley peering into the shadows and they had crouched breathless until he passed them.

The noise of the city had quieted. Except for an occasional street car or passing automobile a silence brooded over the downtown district. Stray cats appeared to rummage in battered cans and a huge rat darted between their legs.

The cool of the night, Southern California's balm to aid sleep "knit up the raveled sleeve of care," chilled them. Murphy took frequent "nips" from a flask, which he offered generously to his companions each time before he put it to his mouth. Brennan told them stories of experiences in the Canadian northwest and adventures in a "comic opera" revolution in Central America. Murphy supplied anecdotes of the ring, things he had seen and done as a second at boxing matches. John listened to them, enraptured.

Somewhere a clock struck the half hour, and as the sound died away they heard quick footsteps approaching them. Murphy looked cautiously around the corner of the brick wall and brought himself back with a jerk.

"It's them," he said, in a hoarse whisper. He stepped back to make room for John and Brennan at the narrow aperture looking out on the alley.

Two figures passed their hiding place, walking hurriedly. The taller of the two strode with a quick, easy step that John recognized.

"That's Gibson," he said in a sharp whisper.

"It certainly is," corroborated Brennan.

"And it's the 'Gink' with him."

They watched the figures until they halted at the rear of the saloon. They saw Cummings reach in his pocket for the key and open the door while Gibson glanced up and down the alley. When they had disappeared into the building Brennan stepped out into the alley, motioning to Murphy and John to follow him.

Again in single file, with Murphy taking the lead from Brennan, they walked warily toward the saloon, holding close to the back walls of buildings so as not to be seen from either end of the alley. Murphy removed the padlock from the basement door and opened it with precautionary slowness to minimize the rasp-

ing of the rusty hinges. He closed it again when they had entered the impenetrable darkness of the basement.

Led by Murphy, who held the flashlight, they went ahead on tiptoe until they reached a spot which they judged was directly beneath the little room in which they believed Cummings and Gibson were in surreptitious conference. There they strained their ears to catch the sound of voices above them. John's heart thumped against his ribs and he imagined his breathing sounded like a gust of wind. The floor of the room above was less than three feet above their heads.

A chair scraped on the floor. Then they heard voices. Tense, holding their breath, they poised in utter silence, straining to distinguish what was being said by the two in the room above their heads. John felt a sinking sensation of disappointment as he realized it would be impossible for them to hear the conversation between the "Gink" and Gibson from where they were listening. The voices that came down to them were jumbled, faint, indistinguishable. Once Gibson laughed. Again the two voices above them stopped suddenly as if the two conspirators had heard a warning sound.

Brennan signaled to them a moment later, when the two voices were audible again, to

leave. Murphy snapped the padlock on the door and they crept back to their hiding place between the two buildings.

"There was no need for us to stay there any longer," said Brennan. "We couldn't hear a word. There's only one way to get what we want and that is to use a dictograph. We'll have to run a wire with an 'ear' on it into that room, somehow. Do you think we can do it, Murphy?"

"Sure thing," Murphy replied.

"The sooner the better," said Brennan. "We'll try to get it in tomorrow night. With a dictograph we can get every word that's said. We can bring a shorthand reporter with us and get it down in black and white. In the meantime we'll wait here and see them when they come out."

Shortly before one o'clock they heard footsteps that told them Gibson and Cummings were returning from their conference. Directly opposite the aperture between the two buildings, where they were hiding, the taller of the two figures stopped and striking a match held the flame, cupped in his two hands, to the end of a cigar. The light of the match flickered only for a second, but in that time John and Brennan saw Gibson's face clearly. Tossing the burned match to the ground he quickened his steps until he was again at Cummings'

side and they went from sight around the corner.

"He couldn't have done it better if we had asked him to," commented Brennan, referring to the light Gibson had thrown on his face by lighting the match. "I wonder what he'd do if he knew that we were watching him as he did it."

"Swallowed da stogie," Murphy suggested.

"Tomorrow night, same time and place: 10 o'clock at Second and Spring," Brennan instructed Murphy before they separated.

"I'll be there," agreed Murphy, walking from them.

"Just a minute, Murphy," called Brennan, "you forgot something."

Murphy halted.

"What?" he asked.

"You forgot to put a 'see?' on the end of 'I'll be there.'"

Murphy grinned, waved his hand and went his way.

The next morning after only a few hours' sleep, John and Brennan told P. Q. and the "chief" of their discovery. Brennan's plan for the use of the dictograph was approved and they were commended for their enterprise.

"If you put this over," the city editor told John, "I'll double your salary."

It was P. Q. who suggested that Benton,

the photographer, accompany them and endeavor to obtain a picture of Cummings and Gibson together.

"That would cinch it," he said. "If we could print a picture of Gibson and the 'Gink' it would be irrefutable proof of the conspiracy."

"It would be risky business; might spoil everything," Brennan remonstrated.

"Could it be done this way?" said P. Q. "While you and Gallant are in the basement with Murphy and a shorthand man, Benton can fix himself outside the door so that when Gibson and Cummings come out he can shoot a flashlight. He can have an automobile close and make a quick getaway by jumping into it. When you have enough of the conversation between Gibson and the 'Gink' you can come outside, tip Benton to be ready and wait for him in the machine. They can't chase you. By the time they get a machine you should be a mile away from them."

"All right, P. Q., we'll try it that way," agreed Brennan. "Benton had better be with us tonight. Whose automobile shall we use and who'll drive it? It must be someone we can trust."

"You can arrange that to suit yourselves," said P. Q.

"Don't be afraid to spend money," said the

publisher. "It's a big thing you're going to do, boys, and I won't forget you, whether you succeed or not."

That afternoon they obtained the dictograph. It was loaned them by Hubert Kittle, aviator, former police officer, one-time contender for the heavyweight pugilistic championship of the navy, dare-devil and adventurer. Later in the day Ben Smith, official court reporter and one of the fastest and most accurate shorthand men in the country, agreed to share in their adventure.

"I'd trust Ben with my life," Brennan remarked to John later. "If there ever was a man who knew how to keep his mouth shut, it's Ben. Whenever the district attorney's office or the police or the sheriff have something really big, something that must be kept absolutely secret, they call him in and he never has failed them."

"What about the machine and the driver?" John asked.

"That's what has me stumped," Brennan admitted. "Most all of the taxi drivers are lined up with the 'Gink' in some way or another. We must have someone we can not only rely upon, but who can drive. Believe me, Gallant, we can't afford to take any chances."

From Ben Smith's office in the Hall of Justice building they went to the city hall to break

the news of their discovery of the meeting place of Gibson and Cummings to the mayor. While Brennan was telling the story and describing how they had planned to obtain a written report of the conversation between Gibson and the "Gink" by use of the dictograph, the mayor sat perched on the edge of his chair, his eyes gleaming with pent-up excitement. When Brennan had finished he bounced up and circled the desk with quick strides to shake them both by the hand.

"You've done it, boys, you've done it," he said.

Then he turned his face from them and drew a handkerchief from his pocket.

"Don't mind me," he said, dabbing with the handkerchief at his eyes. "I'm an old fool. But I've been under a terrible strain, boys, these last few weeks and what you told me was almost too good to be true."

He turned to face them as quickly as he had turned away, and he was smiling.

"What about tonight?" he asked. "Is there anyway I can help you? Are you all fixed?"

"All we need is a fast machine and a good driver," said Brennan. "Someone we can trust and rely upon. Can you suggest anyone?"

"I certainly can," said the mayor.

"Who?"

The mayor's face brightened.

"The mayor of Los Angeles," he said.

"You mean——"

"I mean it," assured the mayor. "I have the fastest car that can be bought and I'm not afraid to step on it. What more do you want?"

"It's a go!" exclaimed Brennan, and they shook hands all around.

John long remembered the meeting between the mayor and Murphy when they assembled at Second and Spring streets that night at ten o'clock. Oddly it was the mayor who was flustered when the two were introduced by Brennan, probably because he felt he owed so much to the scrawny youth who stood before him.

"Murphy, my boy, I—I—I don't know how to thank you," the mayor began and then, fearing that sounded too stiff and formal, he added, "If I'm re-elected it will be largely because of what you've done and you can have the best job I've got to offer."

"I got my own reasons for doin' what I've done, see?" said Murphy, "but I'll take you up on dat job offer of yours if we come through all right, see?"

"You're—you're—you're all right, Murphy," returned the mayor.

They sat in the mayor's automobile while Brennan outlined the detailed plans for their expedition.

"When they close up for the night, Murphy, Gallant and I will go in and rig up the dictograph," he said. "Ben, you might as well come along with us. It would be taking too much of a chance for one of us to go out and get you.

"Mr. Mayor, you'll park your car close to the alley and wait with Benton until one of us comes out. Then you'll drive to within a few yards of the rear door of the saloon and keep your motor going, while Benton sets up his camera. When we have enough of their conversation we'll come out and get in the car with you.

"One of us will stand by Benton—I'll do it—until he shoots his flash as Cummings and Gibson come out. Benton and I will run for the machine and as soon as we hop on the running board, Mr. Mayor, you start—going. Don't stop for anything and remember to turn your lights off while you're waiting. Now, does everyone understand?"

Each signified that he knew his part.

"One slip will ruin everything," Brennan warned them. "It's our one chance and a mistake will be costly. If something happens and the mayor's car stalls, Gallant and I will stay behind to handle the 'Gink' and Gibson and the rest of you beat it. You, too, Murphy,

do you understand? Gallant and I can take care of ourselves."

They waited until after eleven o'clock before they left the corner of Second and Spring in the mayor's car. It was Saturday night and there were twice as many people on the streets at that hour than during the week days. As their paper published no Sunday edition, John and Brennan realized that if they were successful the exposure of the Gibson-Cummings' plot could not be made until Monday or Tuesday at the earliest, which would be three or four days before the primary election, scheduled for Thursday.

At Brennan's order the mayor drove the automobile up and down Spring street, from Second to Eighth and back. Each trip as they passed the saloon they watched for signs of it being closed for the night. At half-past eleven they saw that the lights were extinguished, the doors closed and the steel lattice work drawn across the open front to protect the cigar stand for the night.

The mayor swung the automobile into the first street intersecting Spring street, toward Main, stopping it at Brennan's instructions so that it could be driven into the alley without difficulty. Brennan, Smith, Murphy and John left the machine and hurried into the alley. Murphy carried a brace and bit hidden under

his coat. John's left arm was stiff at his side from a steel bar thrust up into the sleeve and Brennan carried the dictograph in a paper package under his arm.

Holding close to the shadows of the brick wall, they walked rapidly to the basement door, opening it and entering quickly. Murphy and Smith were posted at the door to act as guard and to watch for the arrival of Gibson and Cummings. Brennan and John went directly to the trap door at the top of the stairs at the front of the basement. Brennan pushed upward against the door, but it held fast against his strength. John handed him the steel bar. A thrust, a wrench, a tearing of decayed wood and the door yielded. They scrambled through to the floor of the saloon, finding themselves within a few feet of the room where they were to "plant" the dictograph.

"Luck is with us this time," said Brennan as they saw that the door of the room was open. He knelt in the open space between the tiers of drawers on either side of the desk that filled one side of the room. In half a minute the brace was boring into the wood of the flooring. Through the hole cut through the floor Brennan pushed the wires of the dictograph until their entire length disappeared into the basement and the "ear" of the eaves-

dropping device was flat over the perforation. He swept up the shavings from the boring of the hole with his hands as they hurried back down into the basement, where they found the end of the wire dangling from the ceiling. Brennan assembled the dictograph rapidly, attaching to it three head-pieces with receivers clamping over the ears.

"We'll test it," he said to John. "Scoot upstairs and say something in a natural tone in all parts of the room. Try to talk at about the pitch you believe they will speak and drop your voice to a whisper occasionally. Ben and I will listen."

While Brennan and Smith waited with the headgears John followed orders, returning to the basement when he believed he had talked to himself long enough to make the test accurate.

"Works perfectly," Brennan told him. "Heard every word you said. We're all set and ready to go."

John glanced at his watch. It was five minutes after twelve. They made themselves as comfortable as possible on the empty packing boxes. Smith produced his notebooks and a handful of carefully sharpened pencils.

A picture of Consuello as she appeared when she stood beside the window with its red geraniums, reciting the verse in which she

found heart comfort, flashed into John's mind. He closed his eyes to hold the vision in his imagination. It faded away, and another picture took its place, a mental miniature of Consuello as he had last seen her, standing in the doorway, silhouetted in the soft rose light behind her. He saw her hand flutter and the door close. Could it be that with the intuition of a daughter of Eve she knew that he loved her? Could it be that she——

"Brennan," he said, "what is that verse of Kipling's that starts 'So long as 'neath the hills' or something like that?"

In the tiny glow of Brennan's cigarette John noticed a hint of a smile on the other's lips as he recited:

"So long as 'neath the Kalka hills
 The Tonga-horn shall ring,
 So long as down the Solon dip
 The hard-held ponies swing,
 So long as Tara Divi sees
 The lights of Simla town,
 So long as Pleasure calls us up,
 And duty drives us down,
 If you love me as I love you.
 What pair so happy as we two?"

He paused.

"That's it," John said. "There's another

part of it that says something about 'all earth being servant'; how does it go?"

Brennan continued:

"By all that lights our daily life
Or works our lifelong woe,
From Boileaugunge to Simla Downs
And those grim glades below,
Where, heedless of the flying hoof
And clamor overhead,
Sleep, with the grey langur for guard,
Our very scornful Dead.
If you love me as I love you,
All Earth is servant to us two."

He paused again.

"That's it," said John.

"That's a hell of a thing to be thinking about now," said Brennan.

"I know it," John returned.

For several minutes they were silent. John thought he saw Brennan give Smith a significant glance.

"By the way, Gallant," Brennan asked, "how is your friend, Consuello?"

"I'm to have dinner with her and Gibson the night he is elected mayor," John replied, remembering Gibson's invitation.

"Who arranged that?" asked Brennan.

"Gibson."

"I'm afraid we're going to spoil your little dinner party," said Brennan, smiling.

"That verse you just recited for me doesn't rhyme if you make it 'three' instead of 'two,'" John countered.

"You win," conceded Brennan. "What time is it getting to be?"

John looked at his watch.

"Quarter to one," he answered. "What if they don't show——"

A shaft of light shot through the darkness from the door. It was the prearranged signal from Murphy to inform them that Gibson and Cummings were approaching. As if jerked by cords held in a single hand they straightened up from their lounging positions.

They heard the door open at the rear above them and footsteps on the floor, approaching until the noise was directly over their heads. Dust shook down on them from the grimy ceiling.

Simultaneously they pulled on their head-gears and listened.

CHAPTER XX

AS CLEARLY and distinctly as though he was at a telephone John heard the voices of "Gink" Cummings and Gibson in the room above him. Smith began writing his shorthand record of the conversation they overheard as soon as the conspirators began talking.

"Well, what's new?" he heard a voice he knew to be Cummings' ask.

"Things are about the same," he heard Gibson reply. "I can't see how anything can happen now to beat us."

"The newspapers are the only thing that worry me," said Cummings. "Those damn reporters are never satisfied. They keep digging around until they stumble across something and then tear things to pieces. What about them? You haven't heard of anyone of them asking too many questions or getting suspicious, have you?"

Gibson laughed.

"Forget it, Cummings," he said. "I'll handle the reporters. They're not half as smart as they think they are and as people give them credit for being."

In the glare from the electric torch that

Brennan focused on Smith's notebook John saw Brennan wink at him.

"Why, two of them—Brennan and Galant—are my best friends," Gibson continued. "They've fallen for every stunt we've pulled."

Brennan winked again.

"Don't be so cock-sure," Cummings cautioned. "I've had more experience with them than you have and you're all wrong if you think they're a bunch of dumb-bells. You'll have to be mighty careful. You've sailed right along without any trouble because you've had sound advice. As soon as you think you're out of danger, that's the time something's sure to happen."

"I'll admit you've steered me straighter than I could have gone alone," said Gibson, "but don't worry, I'm going to take good care of myself."

There was a silence of a minute. John pictured Gibson and the "Gink" regarding each other critically through the smoke of their cigaret and cigar. It was Cummings who spoke first.

"Gibson," he said, "this will be our last meeting before the election."

"Why?"

"I've decided we can't take any more chances," said Cummings.

Another pause in the conversation. Then—

"Gibson, do we understand each other thoroughly?"

"What makes you ask that?" John believed he detected a note of surprise in Gibson's counter question.

"I want to be sure, that's all," Cummings said. "You know how much I'm relying on you. You know what I've done to put you where you are. You're only going to be mayor for one term and we'll have to clean up enough then to last us the rest of our lives. When your term expires I want to quit the game.

"You were broke when I met you and I've made you mayor of Los Angeles. You have power and a reputation and if you don't spill the beans you'll be a millionaire when you walk out of the city hall in four years. For ten years I've had this plan in my mind, waiting for a chance to work it. When I met you I knew I had the man to go through with it. I've spent a lot of money, risked everything I had and there have been times that I've had a fight on my hands to keep the boys in line.

"It looks now as if I'm going to come out on top. While you're mayor we'll work carefully. Probably it will be a year before we start out after the money. We can afford to wait that long once you're in office. But every-

thing, everything, you understand, depends on you."

"Everything you say is true," said Gibson, seriously.

A pause. When Cummings broke the silence there was a new tone in his voice. It was harsh, dictatorial, threatening, the voice of a man of steel who ruled like an uncrowned king by the fear he instilled in his miserable subjects.

"Gibson," he said, "if you double-cross me you'll wish you had never been born."

John could not help but admire the even coolness of Gibson's voice when he replied:

"There's no need for you to try to frighten me, Cummings."

"I mean what I say," returned the "Gink."

"I know you do," said Gibson quietly. "But I want you to understand something. You and I can get along together without any threats. And another thing. I'm not working with you because I fear you, but because I want what you're giving me. So forget the 'rough stuff,' as you call it."

So delicately was the dictograph adjusted that John heard Cummings draw his breath sharply.

"I've been double-crossed before," he said, "by men a damn sight smarter than you are."

"I'll simply repeat what I just said to you,"

retorted Gibson. "I'm working with you because I want what you have to give me, not because I'm afraid of you or anyone else."

It was a direct challenge to a man who ruled by cowing his adherents, who had never failed to carry out a threat and who was as guilty of murder as the thugs he ordered to beat or shoot to death a rebel in the ranks of crime. But between the two, Cummings was the coward, psychologically at least. His shrewdness told him that it was useless for him to endeavor to control Gibson by threats of physical harm or death and he exercised his tact. He realized also that a man of Gibson's mettle was more to be trusted than a servile, af-frighted weakling.

"You're right, Gibson," he said. "There's no need for either of us to try to frighten the other. Forget what I said a minute ago. I said it without thinking. You can't blame me if my nerves are on edge after what I've been through to put you where you are and you know how much I've got at stake in this business."

"No more than I have," said Gibson. "Cummings, I've never told you this because I didn't think it necessary, but on the day I am sworn in as mayor I hope to be married. You can understand better now how well I

realize that nothing must happen. I'd rather die right here than have any of this business come out to disgrace her."

Cummings received Gibson's announcement of his intention to be married in silence. John expected Brennan to tip him another wink or smile to him at Gibson's mention of his marriage plans. Instead, he saw Brennan's eyes narrow and his jaw set. Whether the expression of anger and determination that came over Brennan's face was caused by indignation of Gibson's duplicity or by friendship for Consuello, whom Brennan had never seen, John did not know, but a thrill of encouragement swept through him as he realized that he was not alone in the fight to save her.

He saw Brennan signal him to approach. Slipping off the headgear he moved noiselessly and leaned forward so that he could hear what Brennan whispered to him.

"It won't be long now before they'll be leaving," Brennan said. "Slip out without making any noise and bring Benton and the mayor for the picture."

John went quickly to the door, where Murphy was on guard.

"Everything o. k.?" asked Murphy in a hoarse whisper. John nodded and went up and out into the alley. He found the mayor

and Benton waiting nervously in the automobile.

"We've got enough to ruin them," he said, anticipating the mayor's eagerness. He climbed into the car and the mayor drove it quietly into the alley, switching off the lights as Brennan had ordered him to do. He stopped the automobile about thirty feet past the door of the saloon. In a minute Benton was setting up his camera on its tripod directly across the alley from the door.

At Benton's request, John stood at the door and flashed on his electric torch long enough for the photographer to get the focus. Although it was less than five seconds that he stood with his back only a foot from the door from which Cummings and Gibson were to emerge, John's imagination created a terrible fear that they would come upon him in the helpless position in which he stood.

"All set," Benton called to him in a sharp whisper. Crossing the alley he saw Benton filling his flashlight gun with flash powder and heard him chanting, softly to himself:

" 'E would dot an' carry one
Till the longest day was done;
An' 'e didn't seem to know the use o' fear.
If we charged or broke or cut,
You could bet your bloomin' nut,
'E'd be waitin' fifty paces right flank rear."

He was at Benton's side when Murphy, Smith and Brennan, in rapid succession came quickly up into the alley from the basement stair. Sharply Brennan ordered John to follow Murphy and Smith into the automobile while he remained with Benton, who stood poised with his finger on the trigger of the flash gun.

As soon as John, with Murphy and Smith, was in the automobile, he looked back. The door opened and Cummings and Gibson stepped out. Benton's flashlight gun boomed and a brilliant white light blazed, turning night into day for a fraction of a second.

The mayor raced the motor as Benton and Brennan dashed toward the automobile and sprang to the running board. John saw Gibson and Cummings, recovering from their surprise, rush after them. Cummings was tugging at something in his right hip pocket.

With a roar from its exhaust, the automobile lunged forward. He heard the mayor curse as he shifted the gears fiercely, each move of his hand giving the car accelerated speed.

"Duck your heads," Brennan yelled.

An automatic pistol cracked out its sharp reports and a bullet tore through the top of the car and shattered the windshield glass to

splinters as the automobile lurched out of the alley.

* * * * *

Murphy sat tilted back in a chair, his feet braced against the sill of the only window of his room. Cigarette butts were heaped in a tarnished brass souvenir ash tray on a table at his side. The Sunday newspapers, from which he had extracted the sporting sections to peruse every line, were scattered on the floor around his chair.

His scraggy hair tousled on his head, a growth of black, wiry beard covering his face, coatless and collarless, he was a picture of coarse self-indulgence. Returning to his room at three o'clock in the morning after separating from the mayor, Brennan, John and Smith following their escape from "Gink" Cummings' pistol shots, he had slept until noon. He went to the cheap dairy lunch near his rooming house for a heavy breakfast of ham and eggs, purchased the Sunday papers and came back to smoke and read.

The room with its disordered bed, drab walls dotted with sporting prints, dusty, rickety furnishings, threadbare carpet and grimy lace curtains, was a dreary, prison-like place. But to Murphy it was the place of his content, as much of a home as he had ever had. He had slept in alleys and deserted shacks and

basements. So to him the room brought no discomfort and was as luxurious in his unimaginative mind as a suite at the Ambassador or the Alexandria. No invitation to the restful mountains or the sparkling ocean, its beaches lined with gay Sunday crowds, floated to him on the breeze that drifted in through the open window. He was enjoying a roustabout's day of rest.

After a while, perhaps, when dusk falling over the city heralded brooding night, he would emerge from his room to visit his favorite pool room, where, in an atmosphere blue with smoke, he would lounge in a chair at a wall and exchange gossip of sport and sporting things with other hangers-on. From there he might wander in upon a friendly "crap" or card game behind the locked door of an unventilated room of a Spring street "social club." Or he might go to one of the stuffy, over-heated gymnasiums to watch some industrious and ambitious boxer in training. That was his life and he was happy in it, a hand-to-mouth sort of existence in which he was satisfied.

At intervals a thrill of the excitement of the adventure of the night before, when he had played an important part in the trapping of "Gink" Cummings and Gibson, returned to him. It was difficult for him to realize

that the mayor of Los Angeles had taken him by the hand, like a brother, and thanked him and promised him the best job at his disposal if he was re-elected. He remembered having told the mayor he could drive like "Jimmy" Murphy, the racer, when they had sped out of the downtown district and away from possible pursuit. He remembered how he had patched a cut over the mayor's eye, a laceration caused by a piece of the shattered windshield, with the skill of facial repair that he had learned as a second at the Vernon ring.

The "Gallant kid" and Brennan, they were "regular guys," all right. Brennan was a "wisecracker," all right, all right. Some day he'd tell them why he was helping them. They thought he was doing it for the money they gave him. He wouldn't "double-cross" the "Gink" or anyone else for money, see? What kind of a "bird" did they take him for, anyway? A "stool-pigeon"? He'd tell them why some day and they'd know that Tim Murphy wasn't no "stool-pigeon." He'd tell them——

A rap on the door! He brought his feet down from the window-sill. The "Gallant kid" or Brennan, probably, or, maybe it was his friend, the mayor. He rose and, crossing the room, turned the key in the lock. He was about to put his hand on the knob when

the door pushed open toward him and three men sidled into the room. Murphy cringed back as one of them shut the door quickly, locked it and turned to face him, putting the key in his pocket.

It was "Slim" Gray, the "Gink's" right-hand man!

"Slim" Gray, cold-eyed, his thin lips pressed tight together; "Slim" Gray, hard, venomous, merciless, hate blazing in his eyes. And the other two looking at him contemptuously, snarlingly. Two of the "Gink's" men!

For nearly a minute they stood there looking at him, without moving. For nearly a minute he stared back at them as if they had hypnotized him; his arms half lifted, his head bent forward, his mouth hanging open. A sickening feeling of terror caused his hands to tremble and his knees to feel as though they were giving way under him.

He knew they were going to "bash" him, probably kill him. He might have been able to handle "Slim" alone, but those two powerful bruisers—they'd kill him, sure. He checked an impulse to scream. They'd throttle him if he did. Maybe he could talk himself out of the trap.

Twice before he managed to gasp out "Slim!" his lips formed the word, but no sound came from them.

"Shut your ——— mouth," said "Slim" through his teeth.

He threw himself back as though he expected the words to be followed by a rain of blows. His back was flat against the wall. If he could only get around to the window he could dart out and down the fire escape. Divining his one and only hope of escape, one of the "bashers" sprang forward, grabbed him by an arm and whirled him into a chair. He cringed as the bruiser stood over him, his big fists clenched and ready to strike.

"Get back, Louie," he heard "Slim" order sharply. Louie stepped away from him and "Slim" faced him.

"Murphy," said "Slim," speaking slowly, "you've got one chance to get out of this."

"What've I done, 'Slim'?" his voice shook. In his terror he could only think of trying to "stall."

"Don't pull that stuff on me, you damn stool-pigeon," snapped "Slim." "You know what I want from you. Who was that with you last night? Come on, spit it out."

"What're ya talkin' about, 'Slim'?"

"I told you not to pull that stuff. It won't get you anything, see? We know you were in it. You ——— fool, didn't you know we'd find out about you?"

"Ah, 'Slim,' ya got me wrong, I ain't——"

A hand clutched his hair. He could feel the finger nails digging into his scalp. With a jerk that shook him to his feet Louie threw him half out of the chair.

"Cut it, Louie," he heard "Slim" say as he remained where he had been thrown, fearful of lifting his head.

For a minute there was a dreadful silence.

"Murphy," said "Slim," "do you remember what happened to 'Gat' Mollwitz and 'Beanie' Wilson?"

Did he remember? A nauseating feeling gripped him. "Gat" and "Beanie" had defied the "Gink" and they were found one morning beaten and kicked, broken and bleeding. They died in agony a few hours later.

"Don't, 'Slim,' don't!" he gasped.

"Out with it, then, who was that with you last night? Come through and you can get out of town tonight."

Right then something happened inside of Murphy, something a psychologist might be able to describe in vague scientific terms. He became possessed of a desperate courage far greater than he had ever dreamed of having. In that moment of metamorphosis he became a fatalist. He realized that whether he gave "Slim" the information he sought or not the result would be the same. The life would be kicked and beaten out of him. The "Gink,"

to save himself and Gibson at all hazards, would not take a further chance by permitting him to live.

Then why should he give up? Why should he surrender to "Slim" and his "bashers" if he could gain nothing by it? He'd like to be able to live just long enough to tell the mayor and Brennan and the "Gallant kid" the real reason that he helped them trap Cummings and Gibson. He didn't want them to think he had sold himself for money. And even if they killed him now, Brennan and the "Gallant kid" would know that he died trying to protect them, that he wasn't a contemptible "squealer" after all.

As he straightened up from the prone position into which he had been thrown by Louie, he saw, out of the corner of his eye, the pillow under his bed and there flashed into his mind the realization that under it was his revolver. If he could only get it somehow.

"Let's hear it. Who was with you?" demanded "Slim."

Murphy's long dormant imagination began to work. For the purpose of deceiving "Slim" he must keep a mask of servile fear on his face.

"Let me get a shot of hooch, 'Slim,' and I'll tell ya everything," he whimpered. He rose timidly from his chair. Louie and the

other "basher" started toward him, but stopped at a gesture from "Slim."

He went to the battered, flat-topped dresser a few feet from the bed and pulled open a drawer. From it he took a bottle of whisky. Pretending that the cork was stuck he worked with it fumblingly to get time in which to think. He would take a drink, feign that it choked him, stagger to the head of the bed, stumble on to the pillow and then come up with the revolver in his hand. Then he would have them!

He lifted the bottle to his mouth and gulped. He let the bottle fall from his hand as he choked and gasped for breath, sputtering the fiery liquor from his lips. Reeling and spitting he stumbled toward the bed and fell on it. His right hand pushed under the pillow and seized the gun, but not by the handle. In the second that he was trying desperately to wrap his hand around the butt of the weapon and get a finger on the trigger he was lost.

With a warning shout Louie leaped on the bed and grasped his arm.

He felt himself pulled to his feet and hurled to the floor. He shut his eyes. With a sweep of his arm the "basher" crashed a blackjack against his skull. A head splitting flash of blinding light and then darkness and insensibility. He did not feel the brutal blows

that were rained on him nor the kicks that fractured his arms, his ribs and tore deep cuts on his face and body.

"That's enough, boys, beat it," commanded "Slim." As they ran out of the room "Slim" caught sight of Murphy's coat. Quickly his hands went through the pockets. From one he drew a soiled bit of paper.

On the paper was written, "Brennan and the Gallant kid" and the telephone number of the newspaper on which they were employed.

"Slim" locked the door from the outside and tossed the key back into the room over the transom, leaving Murphy for dead.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THAT delightful state of drowsiness that follows after waking from a sound sleep, John mentally reviewed the stirring adventure of the night before. The warm, bright sunshine streaming in through the open windows of his bedroom had wakened him slowly. He could hear his mother in the kitchen, preparing breakfast.

Every detail of how the mayor, Murphy, Brennan and he had succeeded in overhearing a conversation between Gibson and "Gink" Cummings was fresh in his mind. His nerves tingled as he again felt the thrill of those breathless minutes when Benton photographed Gibson and the "Gink" by flashlight and Cummings rained shots after them as they escaped in the mayor's automobile.

It was only a matter of a few hours now before the conspiracy between the police commissioner and candidate for mayor and the notorious king of the underworld to seize control of the city government would be exposed, broadcast throughout Los Angeles as the most sensational news story of the year. Before he returned home, after three o'clock in the morning, John, with Brennan, had in-

formed P. Q. of their success in obtaining evidence to prove the Cummings-Gibson conspiracy. The city editor told them he would communicate with the "chief" Sunday and instructed them to report for duty earlier than usual Monday morning.

"We'll probably break the story Monday," said P. Q. "We'll shoot everything we have: Gallant's story of the framed raid on the Spring street bookmakers, how the 'Gink' regulated crime to give Gibson a reputation; the affidavits of 'Big Jim' Hatch and his wife and give it the finishing touch with Benton's photograph. Of course, we'll have Smith's verbatim report. Arrange with him to have it ready for us without fail by seven o'clock Monday morning. One of you get an affidavit from Murphy, telling his whole story. You've blown the lid off things this time, all right, boys."

Murphy left them before they telephoned to P. Q., so it was impossible for them to arrange with him to meet one of them before Monday. They agreed that John should find Murphy and obtain his affidavit in order that it would be ready for publication Monday.

The elation John felt as a newspaper reporter in having aided in obtaining the evidence for the exposure of the Cummings-Gibson plot changed to regret when he thought of

how it would affect Consuello. Could she, would she remember and follow out her promise to think of him as having done what he believed was his duty? Would she refuse to believe the truth about Gibson or would she, in the bitterness of disillusionment, blame those who brought about the exposure? He pictured her beside her window of red geraniums, lifting tear-dimmed eyes to her "green and friendly hill" and he was unhappy in conjecturing upon her broken heart.

His mother's call to him that breakfast was waiting roused him from his reverie. He had never told Mrs. Gallant that Consuello was Gibson's fiancée; in fact, Consuello's name had never been mentioned between them since the night that Mrs. Gallant had displayed her antipathy for her. He realized also that his mother would not be able to comprehend why Consuello met him in Gibson's absence and would probably consider it an unforgivable breach of etiquette.

At breakfast he told his mother of his adventure of the previous night, minimizing the dangers of the exploit to forestall her inevitable admonition for him to avoid risks of all kinds.

"It's a big thing for me," he said, enthusiastically. "I was promised more salary and a contract if it went through. Of course,

Brennan and P. Q. and Murphy deserve most of the credit, but I helped them."

"What will become of this man Gibson?" Mrs. Gallant asked.

"I've been wondering how he'll take it," he said. "He may try to bluff through, claim it's all a perjured frame-up. But I don't believe he'll do that. You see, he knows that the photograph is absolutely condemning evidence. I expect that he'll simply disappear. He may have left the city by this time. Or he may try to bargain with our publisher by offering to retire as a candidate if the scandal about him is hushed up. I don't believe the 'chief' would consent to that, though."

Usually on Sunday mornings John accompanied his mother to church. This day, however, because it was too late for them to attend the morning service, they went for a walk instead. When they passed the neighborhood motion picture theater John noticed that Consuello's latest picture, the one he had seen at the pre-view, was being shown. An heroic size photograph of Consuello stood in the small lobby of the theater. He noticed that his mother averted her eyes. They walked in silence for half a block and then Mrs. Gallant spoke.

"Isn't Miss Carrillo a friend, a very dear friend, of this Mr. Gibson?" she asked.

"Yes," he admitted. "Why do you ask, mother?"

She did not reply.

"But, mother," he exclaimed, "surely you won't think that she knew of his scheming with 'Gink' Cummings! Will you blame her because someone she knew went wrong? Do you hold her responsible for the faults and weaknesses of others?"

Again Mrs. Gallant did not reply. Her silence provoked him. It was so unlike her to be unfair. He stifled the angry protest he was about to utter.

"Some day, mother, you are going to know her," he said. "Then every unkind thought you have ever held toward her will come back to you in anguish. You know, mother, dearest, how wrong it is to condemn unfairly. That was one of the first lessons taught me by father; to withhold judgment; suppress prejudice until all sides of a case have been heard. That is the keystone of American liberty—'malice toward none.' It was the principle of the Magna Carta, Great Britain's document of human rights, that the English barons compelled their king to deliver to them more than 700 years ago.

"Remember, mother, dearest"—his voice softened—"it was prejudice, intolerance and hate that caused the crucifixion of Christ,"

"John, please," his mother said, gently, "please don't allow anything to spoil our one day of the week together."

"But, mother——" he began.

"My boy! Please," she pleaded.

He had never gone against her wishes when she spoke to him like that. He patted her arm and smiled.

"All right, mother, dearest," he said, "we'll forget all about it now. This is our day together and nothing shall impair it."

How glad he would have been to have been able to have told her of his love for Consuello! How much help she could have been to him, now that he was about to ruin the man Consuello had agreed to take as her husband. If "that" Mrs. Sprockett, who was fostering his mother's prejudice against motion pictures and motion picture players, would only stay more at home with her colicky baby instead of playing the part of a hypocritical Puritan. A passage from Proverbs his father had often quoted returned to him.

"Where no wood is there the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth."

But he chased these thoughts from his head to be a companion to his mother. They admired flowers in gardens of homes they passed, studied interesting architecture they caught

sight of, planned a picnic in the foothills—John thought of the spot where he had watched Consuello before the cameras—recited bits of poetry to each other and enjoyed the afternoon more than any since the death of Mr. Gallant, who had always led them on their Sunday “tramps,” as he called them.

It was earlier than usual when they returned to their home. They shortened their outing because of John's promise to Brennan to see Murphy before morning and obtain from him an affidavit to be used in the printed exposure of Cummings and Gibson.

“Be careful, my boy,” Mrs. Gallant cautioned him as he kissed her before leaving to get the car to go down town.

“Don't worry, mother; there's no danger now,” he assured her.

As he passed the neighborhood picture theater a young girl, sixteen or seventeen years of age, emerged from the door. In the strong light of the lobby he saw her face plainly—a rather pretty face—and he remembered, indistinctly, of having met her, seen her somewhere before. He saw that she recognized him with a startled expression and unconsciously he slowed his steps. The girl hurried to his side and put her hand on his arm.

“Please don't tell, will you?” she begged.

“Tell? I don't understand,” he said.

"Aren't you John Gallant?" she asked. He noticed a look of fear in her eyes.

"Yes."

"I'm Alma Sprockett," she said, as if the mention of her name was sufficient explanation of her request for him to keep whatever she had in mind a secret.

"Well?" he asked, still unable to understand.

"If mother ever found out that I was at the picture show today I'd be in a peck of trouble," she said. "She won't let me go to the movies at all and I have to sneak away and I do enjoy them so much. Now you won't tell your mother or my mother or anyone, will you?"

"Of course not," he answered, smiling.

"Oh, thanks ever and ever so much," she said, and turning, hurried homeward.

That was it, he thought as he waited for his car. Mrs. Sprockett could find time to run around the neighborhood telling others what to do, what not to do, what should be done and what shouldn't be done, but she couldn't be obeyed even by her own daughter! All the way uptown and until he turned into the narrow, foul-aired stairway leading up to Murphy's room, Mrs. Sprockett and Alma, his mother and Consuello were jumbled in his thoughts.

He rapped on the panel of the door of Murphy's room at the end of the dark, dingy hall. When he received no response he turned the knob and pushed against the door, which held fast. Discovering that it was locked he hesitated a moment to decide whether to wait or leave and return later.

A moan, a deep gasping sound, came to his ears. He started and put his ear to the crack of the door. Another moan, fainter than before, sounded in the room.

"Murphy!" he called.

There was no answer from beyond the door, not even a moan. John shook the handle.

"Murphy! Murphy! Is that you? Are you hurt?" he shouted.

No answer, no sound. He put his shoulder to the door and, bracing himself, pushed with all his strength against it, but it held firm. Stepping back he swung a kick against a lower panel. The wood broke and splintered. He dropped to his knees and tore the split pieces out with his hands.

Through the hole in the panel he saw the key "Slim" Gray had tossed back into the room over the transom. Reaching his arm through the opening he picked it up and, opening the door, rushed into the room.

The twisted, broken, beaten figure of Mur-

phy lay on the floor near the foot of the bed. The awfulness of the sight turned John sick and with a choking cry of pity and despair he dropped to his knees beside it.

"Murphy! Murphy!" he cried. "What have they done to you? Can you hear me? Speak to me, Murphy, speak to me."

The head of the "bashed" youth rolled limply from side to side and he groaned unconsciously. John shut his eyes to close from vision the swollen, lacerated face of his friend. Fury surged through him as he jumped to his feet. He knew intuitively that Murphy was the victim of "Gink" Cummings' brutality. He wanted to kill Cummings with his hands.

Sobbing, he ran from the room and dashed to the nearest telephone. He called the receiving hospital, telling the attendant to rush the ambulance at top speed. He waited at the street entrance to the rooming house until the ambulance arrived, its shrill siren whistle clearing a pathway for it through the traffic. Slowly, gently, they lifted Murphy from the floor and, placing him on a stretcher, carried him down the stairs to the ambulance. A morbid crowd, attracted by the sight of the ambulance, thronged the sidewalk.

John sat beside the stretcher with the white-clad attendant as the ambulance sped up Third street to Hill and turning to the right

stopped with a creaking of brakes in front of the hospital door. He waited anxiously for the surgeons to make their examination. Two detectives hurried from central station to the hospital and getting what information John had, dashed out to a waiting automobile.

In his anxiety as he waited for the verdict of the surgeons he only gave the detectives Murphy's name and the address of the rooming house. They were gone before he could tell them he knew Murphy had been "bashed" by the "Gink's" men.

"He's in bad shape," the chief surgeon told him. "Skull fracture; arms, jaw, ribs and nose broken; internal injuries; cuts and bruises; lost a lot of blood."

"What can be done to save him?" John asked.

"An operation is about the only thing," the surgeon replied. "He's pretty far gone."

"Operate then," said John. "Get the best surgeons in the city to help you. Spare no expense."

An hour later Murphy was on the operating table with three of the most capable surgeons in Los Angeles working with all their skill and science to hold the flickering life in his body. Not knowing where to find Brennan, John telephoned to P. Q.

"I'll get in touch with the mayor and have

him tell Sweeney to put every available detective on the case," the city editor said. "Do everything you can for Murphy. Be careful yourself. If the 'Gink' knows what Murphy has done he knows that you and Brennan were with him. He'll not stop at anything. I'll try to find Brennan."

While Murphy was in the operating room, Chief Sweeney, with a squad of detectives, appeared at the hospital and questioned John.

"I've just talked with the mayor," Sweeney said. "He has told me enough of what has happened to convince me that the 'Gink's' men did this. I'm going out now to arrest Cummings on suspicion and hold him in jail until we see how Murphy comes out. If he dies, I'll charge Cummings with murder if it's the last thing I do on earth."

John noticed as Sweeney and the detectives hurried away that several of them carried sawed-off shotguns.

A few minutes later they wheeled Murphy out of the operating room on a carrier and placed him on a cot in one of the wards. John approached one of the surgeons, swathed in sterilized clothes and apron.

"Will he live, doctor?" he asked in trepidation.

The surgeon answered without looking up

from the rubber gloves he was peeling from his hands.

"He has a chance," he said.

"Much of a chance?" John asked.

"Not much, I'm afraid," the surgeon said. "You see, he is weak from the loss of blood and he is hurt internally. His ribs have punctured his lungs. Only one in a hundred injured the way he is ever recovers. We'll do everything we can now, but we're almost helpless."

He went to Murphy's bedside. The figure stretched flat on the bed was motionless except for an almost indiscernible trembling of the covering that showed Murphy was still breathing. The face of the unconscious youth was hidden by bandages. A pungent odor of ether filled the room. As John looked down on the bed, praying that the little flame of life would not be extinguished by the cold breath of death, he became conscious of the fact that someone else had entered and was standing close behind him. Believing it to be a nurse he turned slowly to ask if it was possible that Murphy might regain consciousness after the effects of the anesthetic wore off. He found himself facing the mayor.

For fully a minute the mayor stood looking down at Murphy. Tears filled his eyes and

brimmed over his cheeks. He let them fall unheeded as he lifted his eyes to John.

"Gallant," he said, "if you don't mind, I'm going to pray for the life of this boy."

John bowed his head. He saw the mayor drop to his knees at the side of the bed so that his forehead touched the covers.

"'Thy will be done,' oh, Father," he heard the mayor pray, "but we ask Thee in Thy gentle mercy, to spare us the life of this boy. We ask Thee to hold the life in his poor, battered body; to bring him back to us. We ask it, oh, Lord, in the name of Thy son; Amen."

The mayor rose to his feet and they walked from the room.

"I hope you'll tell the people of Los Angeles what Murphy saved them from," said the mayor as they separated outside the hospital door. "Whether I'm re-elected or not I'll not rest until the brutes who beat him are brought to justice. You can tell them that, too."

Dusk was deepening into night as John entered the detective bureau at central station, around the corner in First street from the hospital. He found the two detectives who made the first investigation of the case writing out their reports.

"Three men did it," one of them told him. "They were seen entering and leaving the house. Two big fellows and a small, thin-

faced man. No one heard the noise or suspected that anything was wrong."

"No identification of the men?" he asked.

"Not yet," the detective replied. "We understand the chief and a bunch of the boys are on the case and may make an arrest before morning. By the way, if you're a friend of Murphy's you'd better go down to his room and take charge of his things. There's no lock on the door now, you know, and things are liable to disappear."

"Thanks for the tip," said John. "I'll attend to it."

He went direct to Murphy's room from police headquarters. The room was dark and, scratching a match, he lighted the gas at a jet in the wall. He thought of how rapidly gas illumination in homes had disappeared. He remembered Consuello's father telling him that as late as 1870 there was only one street lamp—a gas one—in Spring street, although there was agitation among the citizens to have the city council add another light to put "as far south as First street."

As he inspected the room in the pale light from the gas flame he tried to picture in his mind how Murphy had tried to save himself from the three bruisers. He discovered the stain caused by the spilled whisky, the empty bottle under the bed. Then, suddenly, it

flashed into his mind that Murphy might have been beaten to force him to reveal the names of those who were with him. He stopped his work of collecting Murphy's few belongings as this possibility came into his brain.

Had Murphy told? Beaten and kicked and facing death had he sought mercy by revealing who had the evidence against Cummings and Gibson? Or, had he passed into insensibility keeping it a secret?

He heard footsteps approaching the room. Perhaps it was Sweeney and his detectives coming to inspect the scene of the brutal attack. It might be Brennan.

The door swung open and three men entered the room quickly. John recognized one of them as "Slim" Gray.

He knew he was face to face with the men who had "got" Murphy.

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE fraction of the second that he stood facing "Slim" Gray and the two bruisers, tense and glaring, the cool self-possession he had acquired in his training as a boxer overcame his mental confusion. With one quick glance he saw the cold hate gleaming in "Slim's" eyes as he stood with his back flat against the door and noticed that one of the "bashers" wore brass knuckles on his right fist, while the other had pulled a black-jack from his pocket.

The iron bedstead was between him and the two thugs. As one of them started forward John stooped and grasped the empty whisky bottle on the floor at his feet. From his crouching position he leaped toward the window, his only avenue of escape. Louie—it was he who was armed with the black-jack—jumped at him with a curse, his skull-crashing weapon held back to strike a blow. Coolly, with the mental rapidity he had developed as a boxer, John darted toward the bruiser and back. Tricked by the feint, Louie lurched forward with a sweeping blow of the black-jack. The momentum of the swing of his arm drew his head down and with a quick slashing move-

ment, like a pugilist chopping with his fist, John crashed the bottle against Louie's temple.

The bottle shattered and Louie, blood gushing from the wound, crumpled at his feet, John tossed away the neck of the bottle and barely had time to side-step the onrush of the other thug, who struck viciously at him with the fist armored with the knuckles. As they drew back John was in the position of a boxer, standing lightly on his toes, his left hand extended with the shoulder drawn up to protect his chin, which rested against his collarbone, his right arm crooked back. The bed was between him and the door, where "Slim" stood.

The "basher" swung up from the hip with his right arm, aiming for John's face. A man who "leads," or strikes first, with his right hand, is a target for a trained fighter. Warding off the blow by lifting his left arm so that it caught the descending fist on the tightened muscles below his elbow, John stepped in with a swift right-cross to his opponent's chin. A sharp pain shot through his clenched fist and he knew he had smashed a knuckle as it crashed against the jawbone.

His head jerking as he received John's punch, the thug reeled back, throwing up his hand to cover his face. John rushed at him and sank his bruised right fist into his middle.

As the fist clouted against his abdomen the bruiser grunted and, doubling over, grabbed John in his arms. John lifted his left arm as they clenched and pushed his elbow against the other's throat. Pulling himself out of the clinch as the "basher's" hold weakened when the elbow pressed against his neck, John whirled and stopped with his back against the wall. He danced lightly from side to side to confuse the thug, who stood panting before him.

Louie, only stunned by the blow with the bottle, pulled himself to his hands and knees. John saw that his face was smeared crimson from the cut on his head. Realizing that the "basher" in front of him was "stalling" for time, waiting until Louie was on his feet again John darted to one side and seized a chair, swinging it up over his shoulder. His hand with its broken knuckle was puffed and painful and it hurt to bend the fingers to grasp the chair.

Louie was on his feet, poised for a leap. John threw the chair at the "basher" before him and dashed to the other side of the room.

"I'll get him, Joe," Louie gasped, wiping the blood from his eyes and taking a firmer grip on the black-jack. As Louie rushed at him John seized the heavy water pitcher on a table near him and hurled it. With a snarl on his lips, Louie ducked and the pitcher broke against the wall behind him. Louie was smarter than Joe

had been. He "led" with his left hand and as the blow was warded off he swung the black-jack with his right. John jerked back his head, but the club grazed his cheek, tearing open the flesh. Before he could recover, Joe's brass knuckles crashed against his forehead, opening another cut.

John wobbled to his feet. His brain was numbed and he was blinded by the blood from the laceration over his eyes. Feebly he lifted his arms to protect his head. Joe pulled his arms down from his face and Louie drew back his black-jack for the knockout blow. As he was about to strike, John, with the last flickering move of instinctive self-protection, sank to the floor. With a curse, Louie lifted his foot to kick the prone figure beneath him.

John nerved himself for the blow that was to knock him insensible. He knew it was the end. He heard a scuffle of feet and dimly, through the blood from his wounds he saw Louie and Joe step back from him. He shut his eyes. They were going to kick him to death. If he could only—but why didn't they move? Why didn't they kick him? What were they waiting for?

Unable to believe his eyes, he saw the legs of Louie and Joe take backward steps until they were back against the wall. Did they think he was "out"? Were they leaving him for dead?

Fascinated, he stared at the legs of the bruisers and then he heard a voice, a voice he recognized.

"Keep 'em up," the voice commanded, coldly, evenly, "Keep 'em up. The first one of you that tries moving gets it, understand?"

Slowly John lifted his head. It ached splittingly and lolled heavily on his shoulders. Weakly he pressed his hand against his cut forehead, stopping the blood from dripping over his eyes. Blinking to clear his vision he looked around the room.

In the doorway stood Brennan, a .45 caliber army model automatic in his hand; a very different Brennan from the reporter John knew. A Brennan with eyes as cold as the steel of the gun he gripped; a Brennan with an unwavering hand and a steady voice; a Brennan like the hero of the stories he told of brave men leading forlorn-hope charges. Good old Brennan! He had them, all right. Good old Brennan!

With their backs to the wall, their hands high above their heads, stood "Slim" Gray, Louie and Joe, ghastly pale, staring as if they were hypnotized at the pistol that pointed toward them.

"Drop that sap!" Brennan snapped.

The black-jack fell from Louie's upraised hand, bouncing as it hit his shoulder and dropped to the floor.

"How badly are you hurt, Gallant?" Brennan

asked, without looking away from his three prisoners.

"I'm—I'm all right," John replied, struggling to his feet. "Good old Brennan," he added, essaying a smile.

"Good old nothing," said Brennan. "Wrap a towel around that head of yours and if you think you can make it, get downstairs to a phone. Get Sweeney; he's back at central station now."

John staunched the flow of blood with a towel and, faint from the reflex action of the blows he had endured, walked falteringly out of the room. At the door Brennan stepped to one side to allow him to pass, but never took his eyes from the three men with their hands above their heads.

The clerk at the corner cigar store gaped when John, the crimson stained towel swathed about his head, walked in to the telephone. In less than a minute he had Chief Sweeney on the wire.

"Chief, this is Gallant—John Gallant," he said.

"Yes, what is it?"

"We've got the men who beat up Murphy."

"Where?"

"In Murphy's room. Brennan is covering three of them with a gun now. Come as fast as you can."

His strength returning gradually, John walked a little more steadily as he hurried back to the room. Brennan and his prisoners were in the same positions as when he left them.

"You're lucky I didn't kill you as soon as I came in," he heard Brennan say to the three against the wall. "If Gallant had been out I would have killed you. It's a good long stretch in San Quentin or the rope for all of you if Murphy dies."

"Slim" and his two bruisers glared at their captor.

"I know what you're thinking," Brennan continued. "You're thinking about rushing me. You think I could only get one of you before the other two got me. Each of you would start right now if you were sure you weren't the one I'd get. That's what you're thinking and if you weren't all cowards you'd come at me. Well, why don't you try it? But before you do, let me show you something. See that picture of Jack Johnson on the wall over there? See how small the head is? Well, watch this."

With a jerk of his wrist he tossed the gun into the air, caught it by the butt and the roar of a shot shook the room. He had fired a second after the pistol was in his hand. Where Jack Johnson's head had been on the print was a hole about the size of a five-cent piece.

"Come on, now, try rushing me," said Brennan, quietly.

"Slim," Louie and Joe, their eyes returning to Brennan from the hole in the wall, continued to stare at him like hypnotized men.

A white, scared face showed in the doorway. It was the proprietor, roused by the pistol shot. He was almost bowled over a few seconds later when Sweeney, with a squad of detectives, all with guns in their hands, burst into the room.

John saw them snap handcuffs on "Slim" and the two "bashers" and then the room began going around and around and the figures before him began floating up and down. There was a roaring sound in his ears and everything went black. His knees sagging, he sank slowly to the floor.

* * *

He dreamed a dream that was half nightmare and half ecstasy before he regained complete consciousness.

First he was in a room without doors battling alone against an endless line of alternate Louies and Joes who vanished when he struck them. Then he was on the floor waiting to be kicked by a pair of legs that had no body and that tormented him by dancing a jig to the rhythm of a sing-song rendition of "Gunga Din."

When the bodiless legs disappeared he found himself mingling in an every-day Spring street crowd with a towel turban stained with blood, on his head and wondering why none paid the slightest attention to him or his strange head-gear. Alma Sprockett stopped him at a corner and begged him not to tell something he knew nothing of, and he promised her he wouldn't tell and went on his way racking his brain to remember what she had said to him.

A life-size photograph of Consuello came to life, stepped out of its frame in a theater lobby and sailed through a casement window bordered with red geraniums until it reached the top of a hill, marked with a sign board, on which were the words, "Green and Friendly." He sat at her feet on the hilltop and told her all the earth was servant to just the two of them. They were supremely happy sitting there, for days and weeks and years, until a crimson rain fell and a terrible thunder roared. Bolts of lightning crashed all around him and a splinter from one of the bolts was imbedded in his eye and his head began to ache, and then—

He opened his eyes. He was in a bed at the receiving hospital. Putting a hand to his face he felt a bandage over the cut in his cheek, made by Louie's black-jack, and gauze, held in place by strips of adhesive tape, cover-

ing the laceration over his eyes made by Joe's brass knuckles. His right hand was in a stiff, straight bandage, the fingers held flat by splints. Brennan and the chief surgeon were standing at his bedside.

"Hello," he said and his voice sounded far away from him.

"Hello," said Brennan, "how are you feeling?"

"My head aches," he said.

"You'll be all right," said the surgeon. "You fainted from nervous exhaustion and loss of blood and we brought you down here and fixed you up. You cracked two knuckles of your right hand and you have lacerations that we sutured on your forehead and your cheek. You can get up as soon as you feel strong enough."

"What time is it?" he asked.

"It's a little after midnight," Brennan replied, as the surgeon left the room.

"Tell me," he asked, "how did it happen that you got there in time to save me?"

"I telephoned to P. Q. after dinner to tell him that I had Ben Smith's transcript and he told me about Murphy," Brennan explained. "He told me to find you at the receiving hospital here. When I got here they told me you had gone to the detective bureau and at the bureau I learned that you had gone to Mur-

phy's room. I hurried down there and as I got near the door of the room I heard a crash. It must have been when you threw the water pitcher.

"Luckily I had my gun with me. I drew it and pushed open the door. As soon as they saw me standing there with the gun in my hand they lifted their hands above their heads and started backing up. You know the rest of it."

"You saved my life," said John.

"If you're going to start talking like that I'll leave you right now, understand?" said Brennan.

"What happened after I fainted?" he asked, realizing that Brennan meant what he said.

"We took 'Slim' and the other two to the University station and locked them up," said Brennan. "That is, Sweeney and his men took them while I brought you here. I had Sweeney take them out to University station because the other reporters would find out about it if we booked them at Central station and our whole story would have been in their hands."

"There's one thing I can't understand," John said.

"What's that?" asked Brennan.

"Why didn't 'Slim' or Louie and Joe shoot me when I put up a fight?" he asked.

"That's easy to explain," said Brennan,

"They didn't try shooting because the sound of a shot would have roused the occupants of the house or have been heard by someone on the street. As it is, 'Slim' and the two others have been identified as the men seen leaving the place after Murphy was beaten up."

"And how is poor Tim?" he asked.

"There's very little hope for him," Brennan said. "They've taken him to the Clara Barton hospital and the mayor has employed two more physicians to stay with him and do everything they can for him."

"Has Sweeney arrested the 'Gink'?"

"No, Cummings has disappeared; can't find him anywhere?"

"What about Gibson?"

"I don't know," said Brennan. "No one has tried to find him yet. There'll be plenty of time for that after we come out with our blast in the first edition. And that reminds me, P. Q. is at the office now, waiting for me. We'll work the rest of the night and have everything ready to be set in type by seven o'clock. I'm sorry you won't be able to help us. You had better get some rest so that you'll be strong enough to be on your feet in the morning."

"Will you arrange to get word to my mother that I won't be able to get home?" he asked. "Tell her that I must work all night

at the office. Don't give her any hint that I'm hurt."

"I'll arrange it," Brennan assured him, starting toward the door.

"Just a minute," said John, bringing his unbandaged hand above the covers. Brennan stopped and, turning, saw the hand extended toward him.

"I don't care what you say, Brennan," John said, "you've got to shake hands with me."

Brennan hesitated and then returned to the bedside, grasping John's hand. For a moment they regarded each other silently.

"You saved my life, Brennan, and I'll never forget it," said John slowly. "If it had not been for you I would be where Murphy is and you know it."

"If it had not been for Murphy they would have got both of us," said Brennan. "They went to him to try to find out who we were and I don't believe he told them."

"How was it they returned to the room when I was there?" John asked.

"I don't know; they probably spotted you when you found Murphy; but I'm willing to stake my life on it that Murphy was game to the last."

"Brennan," said John, "I'm beginning to think you have a little faith in mankind after all."

Brennan smiled as he dropped John's hand.

"Perhaps I have," he said. "Now go to sleep," he added, "because there's a great day ahead of us." He closed the door softly behind him, leaving John alone with his thoughts.

And his thoughts were of Consuello. He wondered where she would be during the "great day" before them when she read or learned of the exposure of Gibson's alliance with "Gink" Cummings, of the horrible pommeling given Murphy, of the attack upon himself. What would Gibson say to her? What COULD he say to her? He wished that Gibson would disappear as Brennan had told him Cummings had. If Gibson wanted to be merciful that's what he would do, disappear, leave her to think the worst or the best of him, as she chose.

Pondering over everything that had occurred since the first day he met him, John concluded that Gibson's single weakness, his inability to give up his social position when he found himself stranded financially, had worked his ruin. That love of the "niceness of conventionality," as Consuello had described it; that irresistible desire to live an easy life when he should have worked to restore his family fortune; had led him into trouble. At the moment when he was "broke," when circumstances were such that he would be com-

pelled to withdraw as the society man "Gink" Cummings, scheming to seize control of the city government, had tempted him and he had fallen. He sold himself to the boss of the underworld and became perfidious and a puppet so that he might have money and fame while it lasted.

How Gibson suffered by comparison with the example set by Consuello! When the vast wealth that had once been the Carrillo's dwindled and only the few acres of land with the old home was left, she went to work and was loved and respected for what she had done. She had not lost caste by her venture into worldly affairs. That was where Gibson had been short-sighted. He had believed that he would lose standing if he was forced to work for a living; so he took the easier way and like all easier ways, it wrought destruction of his morals, his conscience and his reputation.

From this retrospective philosophizing with the lesson that it taught, John turned to dreaming of Consuello as the one he loved. His imagination, from which he slipped the leash of worry and care, pictured for him gloriously delightful, utterly impossible scenes—Consuello and he on a yacht skimming the rolling waves of the ocean off Catalina, leisurely inspecting some "gabled foreign town"; she another Princess Patricia with "silken

gowns" and "jewels for her hair," loving and wedding him, a "commoner" like the real princess' husband, despite the frowns of kings and queens, and settling down to rule a Graustark-like little kingdom.

When he awoke the following morning a hospital attendant brought him his suit, cleaned and pressed, with a new shirt and collar which, he learned, had been left for him by Brennan. His head had ceased its aching and after breakfast he could only feel a trace of the weakness that had caused him to faint the night before.

As he entered the local room of the newspaper office P. Q. stopped work to rush toward him and Brennan, looking up from his typewriter, emitted a "rousing" cheer.

CHAPTER XXIII

ALL that day the giant presses roared, turning out thousands upon thousands of the newspapers with the story stripping the mask off Gibson and revealing the nefarious plot between him and "Gink" Cummings. All day long delivery trucks piled high with bundles of the papers distributed them to newsboys in the downtown district and throughout the city. Never in the history of Los Angeles had there ever been such a tremendous single-day issue of a newspaper.

Under the glaring headlines was Benton's flashlight photograph of Gibson and Cummings emerging from the rear door of the Spring street saloon where their conversation had been overheard by the reporters. The picture was clear enough to enable anyone who knew either of them to recognize them both. On one side of the cut was Brennan's signed and copyrighted story of the complete exposure of the alliance between the police commissioner and the underworld boss, a clear, concise, dramatic narrative of every event leading up to the denouement. On the other side was Ben Smith's stenographic transcript of the conversation between the conspirators, with all its tell-tale and condemning elements.

Beneath the cut were reproductions of affidavits by John, Brennan, Smith, the mayor, "Big Jim" Hatch and Evelyn Hatch, swearing to the facts contained in Brennan's comprehensive story that jumped from the first page and filled the second. On pages three and four were photographs of Gibson and the mayor; Brennan and Gallant, his face in bandages; Murphy on his cot at the hospital; Murphy's room; the mayor's automobile with its shattered windshield; "Gink" Cummings; "Slim" Gray, Joe and Louie and reproductions of their black-jack and brass knuckles.

There were separate stories dealing in detail with John's experience in Gibson's raid on the Spring street bookmakers; the regulation of the crime wave by Cummings to enable Gibson to add to his false reputation as the feared enemy of crooks; "Big Jim" Hatch's story of how he had been arrested by Gibson because he would not split money he stole in bunko swindles with Cummings; the "beating up" of Murphy and the attack on John; Evelyn Hatch's corroboration of her husband's claims and the pistol shots fired by either Gibson or Cummings, or both, the night they were trapped in the saloon. A strongly-worded editorial branded Gibson as the worst traitor the city had ever known and demanded his immediate retirement as a police commissioner and candidate for mayor. Police

detectives it was announced, were searching for Cummings, who would be arrested as soon as he was located, and held for murder if Murphy died.

Mr. Phillips, the publisher, called John, Brennan and P. Q. to his private office and after he had commended them for their work they rejoiced together, not only because their paper had frustrated the scheming "Gink" and exposed Gibson, his tool, but because they had "beat" all other papers in the city with the story, acknowledged to be the greatest "scoop" ever scored in Los Angeles.

A master musician lives for the applause of his audiences; a great discoverer or inventor has his public acclaim; a statesman or public benefactor is rewarded by the voice of the people; but the gratification of a newspaper man in having accomplished a notable achievement for his paper is his only recompense and it is sufficient.

No medals are pinned on his chest, no roar of applause comes up to him from the multitudes, but he is satisfied. His glory is his own and he is content.

Two hours after the first edition was on the streets, the publisher received a hastily appointed committee representing the Church Federation, the women's clubs and other organizations that had supported and indorsed

Gibson as a candidate for mayor. The evidence, no more than what had been published, was certified to this committee. The Church Federation was the first to act. Unable to locate Gibson to question him personally concerning the exposure and accepting the evidence against him as final, the federation authorized the publication of its withdrawal of indorsement of him as a candidate for mayor and an expression of appreciation of the newspaper's work in bringing the truth to light. Similar action by the other organizations that had been deceived by Gibson followed quickly and before night his political strength had melted away to nothing. Forgotten even was his sensational capture of "Red Mike," now serving a life sentence at San Quentin for his attempt to wreck and rob the Southern Pacific "Lark" train.

Every newspaper reporter in Los Angeles was engaged in the search for Gibson that followed the publication of the exposure of his plot with Cummings. The other papers, anxious to retaliate by obtaining the first statement from Gibson for the blow given them when they were "scooped" combined their forces in a frantic effort to find him before John and Brennan could do so.

The missing man's office and apartment were closed. His secretary, located after a search

of several hours, could give no information concerning his disappearance. The railroad, steamship and automobile bus stations had sold no ticket to anyone answering his description. He seemed to have vanished completely. A theory was advanced that he had fled with "Gink" Cummings and this was gradually accepted generally as the hours passed and no trace of him could be found.

Brennan waited until they were alone before he suggested to John that Consuello might be able to furnish a clew to Gibson's whereabouts. Thoughts of her had been flashing in and out of John's mind during the excitement of the morning. He realized that if anyone knew where Gibson was it would be Consuello, and again he had the disheartening apprehension that, faithful to her love, she might be in flight with the man she was to have married.

"I don't like to speak of it—she's probably very much upset by what has happened today—but there's only one person who may know where Gibson is," said Brennan, "and that's Miss Carrillo."

"I'd rather do almost anything than face her, today," said John.

"You mean with your face bandaged up the way it is?" Brennan asked, a twinkle in his eyes.

"I don't know what she will think of me,"

John said, ignoring the jest. "She has believed in Gibson and she may think that what I have helped to do is a violation of the friendship between us and that I am an ungrateful and deceitful wretch."

"Don't you want to see her and explain things to her?"

"No, not until she sends for me."

"Suppose she never sends for you—what then?"

"Then I'll know that she never wants to see me and—and—that will be the end of it, I suppose."

They were silent for a moment and then, while John was pondering over the thoughts that were in his mind when he had said, "The end of it, I suppose," Brennan without another word, quoted a quatrain from the verse that he had recited while they were waiting to overhear the conversation between Gibson and Cummings:

"So long as Pleasure calls us up,
And duty drives us down,
If you love me as I love you,
What pair so happy as we two?"

John glanced up quickly and saw that Brennan was pretending he just happened to think of the verse and had quoted it with no particular intention or reference to the thoughts of either of them.

" 'And duty drives us down,' " he repeated, smiling.

A little later all thoughts of Gibson and the suggestion that Consuello be consulted in the search for him fled from their heads when they were called by telephone and told that Murphy was sinking rapidly and was not expected to live many more hours. Together they hurried to the Clara Barton hospital.

"I wish he could know that the brutes who beat him have been arrested," said Brennan as they turned west into Fifth street from Broadway. "I tried to talk to them, to find out from them what poor Tim said and did before they knocked him out, but they wouldn't answer. They know what they're up against if he dies and their lawyer has told them to keep their mouths shut. I had the satisfaction of telling them, though, that I'd be on hand to write the story when they are hanged and that I was looking forward to the assignment. 'Slim' almost broke down when I said it."

The mayor, two doctors and a nurse were in the room when they entered. Murphy lay inert on the bed. He had never regained consciousness, the doctors said, and he was in such a weakened condition that only a miracle beyond the skill of surgery and medicine could save him. The mayor looked at them in silence as they approached the bed beside which

he was seated in a chair. They saw that there were tears in his eyes, tears that he was not ashamed of others seeing.

For a quarter of an hour they stood at the bedside while one of the doctors frequently felt Murphy's wrist to catch the fluttering pulse. Then a sound came from the bandaged head and the doctor leaned over, putting his ear close to the hidden face. They heard the sound again and realized it was a whisper.

"He's saying something about the Gallant kid," said the doctor looking up.

John moved to the head of the bed and, leaning over it, said:

"Yes, Murphy; I'm here."

The whisper rose a little becoming audible throughout the room.

"I'm croaking—I guess—ain't I?" it asked.

"You're all right—Tim," John managed to say.

"I didn't squeal — kid — they got me — I didn't tell 'em it was you and Brennan."

"We know you didn't, Murphy."

"I wanna tell ya something—before I go—see?" The whisper became fainter. "I wasn't workin' for ya—for da jack—ya gave me—see? I did it 'cause—my old man—my old man——" The whisper stopped.

"Yes, Tim."

" 'Cause—my old man—my—old—man—
was—was—'Red Mike,'—see?"

A quick intake of breath by Brennan was the only sound that broke the tense silence.

"So—I—wasn't—no—dirty—stool—pigeon
——" The whisper stopped again. Murphy drew his last breath and with it he said his last word:

"See?"

* * *

The news of Murphy's death was printed in the late editions. His voice shaking with suppressed emotion, Brennan dictated the brief announcement of the passing of the twisted-nose youth by telephone to the office.

"Tim Murphy, who was brutally beaten by 'Gink' Cummings' thugs yesterday, died at the Clara Barton hospital as a result of his injuries late today," Brennan said over the phone. At the other end of the wire a reporter was taking the dictation on a typewriter. "Before he died Murphy regained consciousness long enough to disclose that he was the son of 'Red Mike,' now serving a life sentence for having attempted to wreck the Southern Pacific 'Lark.' It was because he believed his father had been the victim of former Police Commissioner Gibsons' lust for glory, he said, that he aided in disclosing Gibson's plot with Cummings to seize control of the city government. His

death means that 'Slim' Gray, Cummings' right-hand man, and his two strong-arm men now under arrest, will be charged with murder and that a murder complaint will be issued against Cummings."

They were silent as they wove their way through the hurrying streams of men and women in Fifth street homeward bound after the work of the day in downtown stores and offices. On the corners newsboys were still selling editions of their paper with the exposure of the Gibson-Cummings plot as fast as they could hand them out. They saw several men stop where they had bought the paper and stand, jostled by the crowd, reading the story absorbedly, apparently amazed by what was on the printed page beneath their eyes.

From the corner of Fifth and Broadway, where he left Brennan waiting for a street car, John went to the receiving hospital to have the wounds on his face and his maimed hand dressed again before he started home. The gauze bandages on his forehead and cheek were replaced with strips of medicated plaster which were less conspicuous, but it would be more than two weeks, the hospital surgeon told him, before the splints could be removed from his hand.

His mother was at the door to meet him when he arrived home. Her face paled as she

saw the plaster hiding the cuts on his cheek and forehead and the bandage on his hand. He took her in his arms quickly.

"I'm all right, mother, dearest," he said. "Don't worry, I'm all right."

"My boy, my boy! Why didn't you let me know you were hurt?"

"There, there, mother," he said, softly patting her with his uninjured hand. "It's nothing to worry about. I've only a couple of scratches on my face and my hand is hurt a little."

He led her into the living room and, seating her in a rocking chair, he dropped to his knees at her feet, as he had in the grief and despair that stunned him when his father died. With caresses and soft words of assurance he soothed her until her dismay left her. At dinner, which had been waiting for him, he told her everything that had occurred since he left her twenty-four hours past. At the end of his story he explained to her what it would all mean to him.

"The 'chief,' that is Mr. Phillips, our publisher, has promised me a contract at double what I'm getting now," he told her. "And, besides, he says Brennan and I are entitled to a bonus for what we've done. It means, mother, dearest, that I've made good; that I've arrived as a newspaper man."

"You know how proud I am of you, John," Mrs. Gallant said. "I never imagined that newspaper work was so strenuous. I thought a reporter's work was writing news instead of making it."

"Newspapers, I have learned, mother, are vigilant guards of the interests of the people," he said. "It is a newspaper's duty to inform the public of what occurs and to prevent as well as condemn wrong. Mr. Phillips told us that the unmasking of Gibson was newspaper enterprise by which the city as well as the paper benefited. Thousands of things not as conspicuous as this are done every year by a newspaper and its reporters and editors."

"Without publicity wrong would go undetected and unpunished. Think of what would have happened if Gibson had been elected mayor of Los Angeles. For at least four years 'Gink' Cummings would have ruled the city and you can imagine what that would have meant."

They were about to leave the supper table when Mrs. Sprockett, weeping hysterically, appeared in a state of excitement that alarmed them. Wringing her hands, sobbing distractedly, she flung herself into a chair and moaned in such a way that Mrs. Gallant hurried to her side anxiously.

"My Alma! My Alma! My girl!" Mrs. Sprockett wept.

"What is it? Tell us. Can we help?" asked Mrs. Gallant while John had a momentary apprehension that Mrs. Sprockett's condition might be the result of a discovery that her daughter had visited the corner motion picture theater surreptitiously.

"She's gone," Mrs. Sprockett gasped.

"Gone?" Mrs. Gallant exclaimed.

"Gone," Mrs. Sprockett repeated, and then, with a sob of despair, she added, "Kidnaped!"

"You mean she has disappeared?" asked John, feeling that her fear that Alma had been abducted might be far-fetched.

"She has been gone since morning," continued Mrs. Sprockett, a little calmed by the sound of a masculine voice. "Ever since morning. Someone has stolen her. Oh, my little girl; someone has stolen her. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Try to calm yourself," urged Mrs. Gallant. "She will probably return before long."

"She left no note? Gave no warning?" John asked. "She may have run away of her own accord, you know," he added.

Mrs. Sprockett stopped her sobbing and sat upright in her chair. Indignation blazed in her eyes.

"How dare you, sir? How dare you?" she demanded, furiously. "How dare you stand there and tell me that my Alma left me of her

own free will? My Alma leave her mother who loves her so? My Alma run away like some common scamp? I didn't come here to be insulted like that, sir!"

A look from his mother caused John to repress an inclination to ask her to tell him really why she came to them.

"I'm sorry," he apologized. "I didn't mean to insinuate——"

"You did! You did! You stood up there and told me that my little girl who loves her mother ran away from home," Mrs. Sprockett cried, irrationally. "That's what you did! You stood up there——"

"I'm sorry," interrupted John, moving from the room to avoid the outburst.

He stepped out on the porch and found Mrs. Sprockett's husband, coatless and collarless as usual, with the same weary look about his eyes and the same hopeless droop of his narrow, rounded shoulders, mounting the steps. Across the street, in the Sprockett home, the baby wailed and fretted.

"Beg pardon," began Mrs. Sprockett's husband. "I just thought——"

"Yes, she's inside," said John, anticipating the inevitable question.

Instead of moving on into the house Mrs. Sprockett's husband stood where he had stopped.

"Our Alma——" he began.

"If you want my advice," said John, interrupting again, "I would wait until morning if I were you and then ask the police to help you find her."

No storm of protest came from Mrs. Sprockett's husband. The instinctive fraternalism of man between man caused him to signal, with a nod of his head, for John to come closer to him. With frequent apprehensive glances toward the door, he whispered:

"Alma's not a bad girl, but she's been held down too much. She's only sixteen and she likes pretty things and picture shows and other things a girl of her age likes naturally. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if she's just picked up and left to go to work some place and have a little more freedom. She's not a bad girl, she's—she's—just a girl, that's all, and she wants to do what other girls do. But, of course, I want her back."

John's sympathy swept away the anger that had surged through him when Mrs. Sprockett became irate.

"I think you're right," he said, remembering how Alma had begged him to refrain from telling anyone that he had seen her leaving the picture show.

"Don't say a word about what I've said to you, will you?" asked Mrs. Sprockett's hus-

band, involuntarily shrinking away from the steps.

"Never fear," John assured him, "and if I can help, let me know."

"Thanks, I will, but Maud—well—you know how it is—you know—sometimes," said Mrs. Sprockett's husband.

"I know," said John, and Sprockett hurried back across the street. A few minutes later the baby's wailing stopped. Mrs. Sprockett's husband appeared on the porch of the Sprockett house with a bundle of blankets in his arms and pacing back and forth, whistled a familiar tune as a lullaby. John listened and distinguished the notes of the father's whistling and smiled to himself as he recognized it as an off-key variation of "The Merry Widow Waltz."

Mrs. Sprockett, still sobbing, and Mrs. Gallant, with her arm around her, emerged from the house.

"I'm going to keep Mrs. Sprockett company until she can rest," Mrs. Gallant explained.

John watched them cross the street and saw the door close behind them. Soon the whistling ceased and Sprockett and the baby went inside.

For half an hour John lolled on the porch, pondering over Alma's disappearance, the abjectedness of Mrs. Sprockett's husband and the spectacle of Mrs. Sprockett's wilfulness.

Had Mr. and Mrs. Sprockett ever, ever been deeply in love, exulting in the happiness before them in married life? How miserable it was that Sprockett had to whisper to him "not to tell," exactly as Alma had?

He found his thoughts distressful and was about to rise, planning an hour with his books before going to sleep, when an automobile—he knew by the outline it was a taxicab—stopped before the house. The driver opened the door and a figure stepped out, hurrying up toward him.

As he came to his feet he saw that it was a girl who was approaching him.

"Mr. Gallant?" a familiar voice asked.

"Yes."

The figure came closer to him and he saw that it was Consuello's friend and companion, Betty.

CHAPTER XXIV

ABASHED by Betty's unexpected appearance at his home and with a sudden fear that something had happened to Consuello possessing him, John waited for her to speak. He noticed that she had not dismissed the cab that waited at the curb.

"Can you come with me immediately?" she asked, quickly. "I want you to see Consuello, tonight."

"Did she send you for me?" he entreated.

"No, but I know that she wants you," she replied.

"Are you sure?" he persisted.

"Don't be a foolish boy," she said, with a gesture of impatience. "No one in the world knows Consuello as well as I do. I am doing this for her. Do you think for a moment that I would be here if I wasn't certain I was doing the proper thing?"

"I know she trusts you," he said, reassured by her mild vexation.

"Hurry, then; I'll explain things while we're on our way. I'll wait for you in the cab," she said.

Mrs. Sprockett's husband answered the door when he crossed the street to the Sprockett

home to tell his mother he had been called away.

"Tell mother that I'm going to see a friend and that I'll be home before it is late," he said. "Tell her there's no need to worry about me."

"Just a minute and I'll call her," Mrs. Sprockett's husband suggested.

"No, just give her my message," he said, apprehensive of the probable consequences of telling his mother that it was Consuello he was going to meet.

As the cab started away from the curb he turned to Betty with the question that, in his mind, had been begging for an answer from the moment he recognized her.

"How is she?" he asked, his voice betraying his anxiety.

"She is very brave," Betty said, earnestly.

"Perhaps I should not ask you this, but has she seen—Gibson?" So much, he felt, depended on her reply to this question. If Consuello had already talked with Gibson and Betty divined that she wanted to see him, then——

"Perhaps I should not tell you, but—she has talked to him. That's as much as I will tell you. The rest must come from her," Betty replied.

She had talked with Gibson and yet she wanted to see him! Or, could Betty be mis-

taken? Had she interpreted Consuello's mood erroneously in coming for him?

"Forgive me for my doubtfulness," he said, "but are you certain that she wants to see me?"

A shade of exasperation crossed Betty's face.

"You said a moment ago that you knew Consuello trusted me," she said. "If she trusts me, then why can't you?"

Reassured by this pertinent counter question he deduced that Betty, with the welfare of Consuello at heart, had concluded that he might be able to furnish the solace her companion needed in her hour of trial. The ecstasy that had thrilled him when he first realized that he loved Consuello returned to him as the cab sped through the streets. She knew now why he had beseeched her to think of him as doing what he thought was right. And she had kept her promise! A glance through the window of the cab at a lighted corner told him that they were nearing their destination.

"I'm going to leave you alone with her," Betty said, with the frankness that she had displayed when they first met. "I need not ask you to be very considerate, to do everything you can to comfort her. In my heart I feel that what has happened is all for the best. How dreadful it would have been if she had been compelled to make this discovery for herself after they were married.

"I told her that I would be away until late; that I was busy. We'll stop at the corner to let you out, because she knows that I took a cab when I left and she might suspect that I went for you. Here we are."

She called to the driver to stop.

"It was kind of you——" he began as he stood at the cab door after alighting. She stopped him with a gesture of her hand. Then, leaning forward a little, her eyes dancing with a smile, she said:

"Don't you know that I know you love her?"

The door closed quickly and the cab spurted away from the curb, leaving him standing bewildered and yet overjoyed by the audacious words she had spoken. So that was why she had called him to Consuello! If Betty knew it, then Consuello, too, must realize that he loved her. The thought frightened him. It had never occurred to him before that she might know. Somehow, he had not dared to imagine that she cared enough even to guess that he loved her.

He went slowly to the opening in the hedge of boxwood that lined the sidewalk in front of Consuello's artistic little dream home and turned into the pathway between the patches of rosebushes. A heavy fragrance from the blossoms filled the still night air. As he stepped on to the porch and reached for the

knocker with his left hand he recalled suddenly that his face bore strips of plaster over his wounds and that his right hand was held rigid in splints. The hesitancy that this recollection gave forsook him when he remembered that Betty had made no comment on his appearance, probably because she had seen the photograph of him that had been published in the paper. Emboldened he rapped with the knocker.

She wore the same simple white frock that he had admired when they first met. For a moment she stood with her hand on the knob of the door, the look of surprise in her eyes fading to an expression of mingled pleasure and perplexity.

"Come in," she invited.

He saw that a tender light, the softness of sympathy, came into her eyes when she noticed the plasters on his forehead and cheek. Then, when she extended her hand to him and he stood awkwardly unable to take it without first disposing of the hat he held, she apologized for her forgetfulness.

"I'm sorry," she said, quickly compassionate.

"It's nothing," he said. "Only a scratch or two, that's all."

They crossed to the fireplace, where she took a chair near the rose shaded table lamp, the only illumination in the room. He sat oppo-

site her, his back toward the door, waiting for her to speak.

"I was thinking of you when you rapped on the door," she said. "I was alone beside my window looking out toward my hill. The darkness of the night prevented me from seeing it, but I knew it was there. Though I could not see it, I looked to it for comfort."

"It won't be hidden from you long," he said. "When the morning comes it will be there and the darkness will be gone."

"When the morning comes," she said, softly, "there'll be sunshine and flowers and birds—and happiness. But it is there for me now, steadfast, loyal, abiding. I know now why I love the hills more than the ocean. They are so fixed, so permanent; unchanging, unmoving; while the ocean storms and calms, thunders and ripples, lures you to its depths and—drowns you."

John knew the inner meaning of her words. Sincerity and deceit. Trustworthiness and treachery. Genuineness and make-believe.

"Was it difficult for you to keep your promise?" he asked, breaking the silence that had followed after she had spoken.

"To understand that you did what you thought was right?" she inquired. He nodded.

"No," she said, "I never doubted that. But

I was never really put to the test. My decision was made before I thought of what I had promised you."

She paused and then, lifting her eyes to meet his, she continued:

"You see, I believe there is only one real love between a man and a woman and that is the love that endures all things. I have always thought—and I still do—that a woman who sincerely loves a man will stay by his side even if the whole world is against him. Unless a woman can do that willingly, gladly, I do not believe that it is real love.

"He came here early Sunday morning and asked me to go away with him. I could not understand and he did not explain. He simply said that something had happened that would prevent him from ever becoming mayor of Los Angeles and that he was going away, never to return.

"'If you love me, you will come with me,' he said. I was bewildered, of course, but I knew that he was right. It was the test, a test far greater than I had ever dreamed would come to me.

"I asked him why it was that he should be compelled to leave the city. He assured me that he had committed no crime. He was very earnest as he spoke and so serious that I knew something terrible had happened. He declared

again and again that he loved me and that if I loved him I would go with him and ask no questions. It was all so overwhelming that I begged him to leave me, to let me decide alone.

"‘I will let you know, tonight,’ I told him. ‘Unless you hear from me you will know that I have decided I cannot do what you have asked me.’

"Soon after he was gone I realized that—that I did not love him with the one great love. I knew that I didn’t because I had not thrown myself into his arms and told him, as Ruth told Naomi, ‘For whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge.’

"I need not tell you in details of how bewildered I was by his strange request and what I went through when I found that I did not really love him. Of course, I tried to imagine what had occurred that caused him to ask me to leave everything and go away with him. Whatever it was, I felt it was cowardly of him to leave unless it was all his own fault.

"So he did not hear from me last night and this morning I read of what he stands accused. But I was prepared. I had chosen my course and what I read only made me certain that I was right; that I did not truly love him, never had and never could. I pitied his weakness. I could see how he had gone astray. You see, I have often wondered how it was he had

money so suddenly after everything he once had had gone from him. The source of his wealth was always a mystery to me."

She paused and looking toward the casement window with its red geraniums, she added, softly: "That is my story. That is what has happened."

In the silence that followed they were both startled to hear footsteps on the porch outside. Consuello looked toward him, quickly, with an expression that warned him. The door swung open and Gibson stepped in, closing it behind him.

"I thought I'd find you here," he said.

His face was pale and a smile that was half a sneer was on his lips as he stood looking at them. John was on his feet facing him and a glance showed that Consuello had also risen from her chair at Gibson's unexpected entrance.

"The girl who said that she loved me and the man who pretended he was my friend," said Gibson, sarcastically.

John's muscles tightened and he bit his lip to restrain the words of warning to Gibson that he was about to speak.

"If you have come here to——" he heard Consuello say, coolly, evenly.

"I came here to say good-by to you," Gibson interrupted, "and to make certain that there had not been some mistake. I thought you

might have tried to reach me last night and failed, or that you might have changed your mind." He paused a moment before adding, "But I know better now."

"You should have known last night," Consuello said. "You should have known that if I had decided to do what you asked me I would have come to you, found you wherever you were."

"I should have known months ago, if I had not been such a blind fool," said Gibson bitterly.

"You were a blind fool," said Consuello, "but not as I suspect you think. You were blinded by your own selfish indolence. You said a moment ago that I told you I loved you. I did tell you that and I thought that I meant it, but when I found that I could not go with you as you asked I knew I had been mistaken. You must remember that I decided against you before I knew the reason you wanted me to leave."

The half-sarcastic smile curled Gibson's lips.

"Then you'll admit that something else—someone else, perhaps——" he said.

"I saw no one, except Betty, from the time you left until Mr. Gallant came this evening," Consuello said. "I'm thankful that I was able to decide before I read what was in the paper today. Reggie, how often have I told you my

conception of love. Don't you know that if I cared for you nothing would have kept me from you? I cannot tell you why it was; I can only tell you how. I knew as soon as I realized that I had refused to go with you blindly that it was not love, the real love, that I had in my heart for you."

"And suppose I had not asked you to go away with me? Suppose I came to you tonight and asked you to stand by me, right here in Los Angeles?"

"It would have been the same," Consuello replied quietly. "I would have given you the same answer."

As she spoke Gibson gazed at her intently and the anger that had smouldered in his eyes disappeared and he forced a smile to his lips as he turned toward John.

"Gallant," he said, "I saw you take terrible punishment one night and stagger to your feet until you were knocked senseless. I admired you that night, Gallant; I envied your courage. When Charlie Murray made his little talk I think I was the first to respond. If you found a \$50 bill in what Charlie turned over to you, you know now who tossed it into the ring." He paused, looked to the floor and then back into John's face.

"Tonight you have watched me take my pun-

ishment," he continued. "I stood on my feet and cheered when you came back into the ring and when you left. I don't want pity or sympathy, but I want you to have a cheer in your heart for me when I go."

Gibson's change from sarcasm and bitterness to a show of manliness relieved the tenseness of the situation. Consuello sank into a chair and gazing into the fireplace, where flames had once sparkled as bright as her romance with Gibson and now only cold ashes remained, left the two men facing each other.

"No one has ever doubted your courage," John said.

"I hope you do not think that I had anything to do with the death of Murphy or the attack upon yourself," said Gibson. "If I had known what they were going to do I would have died fighting them. I took Cummings' gun from him when he fired at you and the others in the automobile. From that minute I have neither seen nor heard from him. If I ever run across him I'll bring him back and surrender him to the district attorney. That is the way I hope to win condonement for what I've done. That is where I'm going when I leave here tonight, to search for him, to the ends of the earth if it is necessary."

"If ever, while you're away, you need help,

let me know," John said, with an impulsive desire to take Gibson's hand. But he stood still, waiting for the other to continue.

"When I came here tonight and found you two together I said things that I'm sorry ever escaped my lips," said Gibson. "I was a cad and no matter what you may think of me for the other things I've done, I want you to forgive me—both of you—for that alone."

Their silence assured him that they were anxious to forget his display of bitterness.

"Will you do me this favor, Gallant?" he continued. "Will you publish tomorrow that you have seen me and that I've started search for Cummings and won't return to Los Angeles until I bring him back with me? Just that much and no more."

"That much and no more," John promised.

Then Gibson turned toward Consuello. She had bowed her head in her hand. He hesitated a moment and then walked slowly to the side of her chair.

"Good-by, Conny," he said.

She looked up at him, tears brimming in her eyes, her under lip caught between her teeth. He tried to force a smile to his lips, but it balked.

"Good-by," she said, and her voice trembled.

He turned away quickly, as if he felt he could not trust himself to be at her side a

second longer. He stopped again, facing John.

"Just one thing more, Gallant," he said.

"Yes," said John, his voice queerly out of pitch.

Gibson looked him straight in the eyes.

"You love her, don't you?" he asked.

Unable to speak what was in his heart, John stood silent. He moistened his lips with his tongue and wondered why it was he could not shout back his answer. Flustered by the boldness of the question put to him so directly, a thought flashed into his mind of Betty's frank declaration that she knew he loved Consuello. Then he discovered the reason why his mother had been so perturbed by his frequent meetings with her. She, too, undoubtedly knew he was in love!

While these thoughts were racing through his head, Gibson put his hand on his shoulder.

"You need not answer, Gallant," he said, "because your silence is enough. Regardless of how incongruous it seems in view of the great wrong I have done her, I love her, too. And, because I love her I can tell that you do. I can see it by the way you speak to her, the way you look at her and unless I am greatly mistaken she knows it as well as you and I do."

He grasped John's left hand in his own.

"Take care of her, Gallant; love her and

try to make her happy," he said. He turned and walked to the door, leaving John speechless and motionless, staring after him. At the threshold he wheeled to face them again.

"Exit, the villain," he said slowly and smiling.

The door closed behind him and his footsteps, taking him steadily, not too fast, not too slowly, from the house, diminished until the only sound audible in the room was the ticking of the clock on the mantel of the fireplace.

John, his back toward Consuello, his eyes on the door, wondering whether it was all a dream, a cheer in his heart for the man who had left them so dramatically, feared to move.

"Exit, the villain"—Gibson's last words—echoed in his brain.

He imagined he heard Brennan saying: "A grandstander, a grandstander to the last."

When he finally turned around, Consuello was standing by the open casement window, looking out into the night, her fingers touching the petals of the geraniums on the sill, in the same position in which she had stood when she had recited to him the little verse with its simple, homely philosophy.

He moved to her side, marveling at her unaffected beauty.

Looking out of the window he saw that the moon, which had been hidden by the clouds an

hour before, had crested her "green and friendly hill" with an outline of silvery-blue.

Something in her pose that suggested to him that she was waiting for him to speak gave him the courage. Yet he was afraid to look at her as he spoke, afraid to see what effect his words had upon her.

"I do—love you," he said.

That little gasp as she caught her breath, what did it mean? Still unable to face her, he continued:

"He knew it; Betty knows it; mother knows it and I want the whole world to know it—I love you." He could say no more.

Gently, caressingly, her small white fingers touched his unbandaged hand. Tremulously he turned his head and saw her answer in her eyes and slowly, almost reverently, he lifted her hand to his lips. A mocking bird broke into joyous song in a tree outside, a golden flood of music to mock the silent song in his heart.

* * *

Lights were shining through the curtains on the windows of the Sprockett house and his mother was waiting up for him when he returned home. As he took her in his arms to kiss her forehead tenderly he had a fantasy that the wonderfulness of his requited love had miraculously altered his mother's opinion

of Consuello. But it was a fantasy, only that.

"Mother, dearest," he whispered, "I'm the happiest man in the world, tonight."

His mother drew back from him and the intuition that had advised her that her son was in love with Consuello, long before he realized it himself, told her the reason for his happiness. She turned away and pressing a handkerchief to her eyes left him with a discordant note breaking the harmony of his ecstasy.

CHAPTER XXV

A DOCTOR is awarded his diploma; a lawyer is admitted to the bar; a preacher is given a pulpit; an actor rises from under-study to the leading role; a newspaper reporter is given a "by-line" and sees his name over a story for the first time.

Under the big head-line. "Gibson Found; Quits Race," and over the announcement Gibson had authorized—"that much and no more"—appeared the magic words, "By John Gal-lant."

By that simple token he passed automatically from the position of "cub" to be a full-fledged reporter.

The only ceremony marking the graduation was when Brennan, leaning over his shoulder as he gazed at his "by-line," said in his ear:

"Looks pretty nice, doesn't it?"

The story stated plainly that Gibson authorized the publication of the statement that he was leaving Los Angeles to search for "Gink" Cummings and did not intend returning until he brought Cummings back with him to face trial for the murder of Murphy, as co-defendant with "Slim" Gray and his two "bashers." John explained to P. Q. that he had given

his word of honor that he would print nothing but the brief announcement. With the city editor's consent he omitted mentioning where he had met Gibson and under what circumstances Gibson had talked with him.

"A newspaper reporter's word must be as good as his bond," said P. Q. "Remember, Gallant, never to print what you have received in confidence. I fired more than one reporter because he broke his word, although in breaking it he gave us a whale of an exclusive story."

Shortly after the first edition was on the streets, John looked up from his typewriter to find Mrs. Sprockett standing beside his desk, about to speak to him. Nervous, distressed, her eyes reddened from a sleepless night of weeping, she asked him if he was too busy to spare her a moment.

"Not at all," he said, rising and placing a chair for her beside his desk.

Fumbling with her handkerchief and appearing apologetic for having spoken to him so sharply the night before, she told him that Alma had been away from home all night and had not returned yet.

"Then, Mrs. Sprockett, there's only one thing for you to do," he said, "and that is to inform the police."

"I have just come from the police station," Mrs. Sprockett said. "They sent me here.

They told me that the best way to find a missing girl was through the newspapers. They said that in 99 cases out of 100 girls who disappear are either found or traced by the newspapers and newspaper men.

"Of course, you know how much I regret having anything concerning Alma appear in the newspapers. I thought there was some other way to find her, some way that would attract less attention. But if it has to be, it has to be, and I'll do anything to bring my little girl back to us."

"You will do the sensible thing if you permit the publication of Alma's picture and a brief story that she is missing," John said.

Mrs. Sprockett drew from her bag a photograph of her daughter and gave John a description of her and the facts relative to her disappearance.

"If anything has happened to her it will kill me," she said, as she rose to go. "I'll owe a debt I can never repay to the one who brings her back to me."

The photograph of Alma and the brief story that went with it appeared in the second edition and John wondered if Mrs. Sprockett's husband had dared to make the suggestion that had sent his wife to the police.

Soon after Mrs. Sprockett left the office, John, unable to wait a minute longer without

hearing her voice, telephoned to Consuello's home. He wanted to tell her again that he loved her, and again and again, and he wanted to hear her tell him, as she had before he left her, that her "dreamings had come true, the brightest and the best." But it was Betty instead of Consuello who answered his call.

"Conny is at the studio," Betty said. "She was called there unexpectedly concerning something about her new picture."

"Did she tell you anything before she left?" he asked.

Betty laughed.

"She told me everything," she replied.

"And is she happy?" he asked.

"Happier than I have ever seen her," Betty assured him. "I'll tell her that you called."

"That I called and that I——" he stopped himself.

"Love her," Betty finished for him.

"More and more every minute," he said, not to be abashed by Betty's good natured presumptuousness.

But whenever throughout the day his thoughts of Consuello and their great love brought him happiness, the haunting realization that his mother still clung to her prejudice against her occupation wore upon him. He had gone to his room after she had left him the night before and at breakfast there had

been a strained effort by both of them to avoid recalling the cause for her distress. He had pleaded and begged her so often to overcome her intolerant dislike for Consuello that he was beginning to fear he would never be able to win her over. Not for much longer, he realized, could he keep his mother's feelings against her from Consuello.

Late in the afternoon, when the clatter of the telegraph instruments and the typewriter had lulled, and tired men lounged, squatted on desks and tilted back in chairs in the local room discussing the events of the day, John and Brennan were summoned to the publisher's private office. There they were confronted by P. Q. and the "chief," the managing editor and the news editor, the quartet often referred to by the reporters as the "brain trust." There John and Brennan received checks for \$500 each and were informed that their salaries had been doubled, the \$500 being a bonus for their work in exposing the Gibson-Cummings plot.

On his way home John decided to make one final effort to change his mother's attitude toward Consuello. He planned it all very carefully. First he would tell her of how his salary had been doubled and then he would turn over to her the bonus check to be banked. Then he would take her in his arms and beg her to listen while he told her of the love

between him and Consuello, whom he was to meet later in the evening.

He was absorbed in thinking of everything he would say to his mother when he got off the street car at the corner and walked toward his home. It was not until he was within a quarter of a block from his home when he saw something that brought him to a sharp halt. Scarcely able to believe what was before his eyes, he stood stock-still for a moment and his worry left him like a weight had been lifted from his soul.

On the sidewalk was Mrs. Sprockett with the lost Alma clasped in her arms. Mother and daughter were alternately laughing and crying and kissing each other. Near them stood Mrs. Sprockett's husband, bouncing the Sprockett baby in his arms and smiling and nodding his head to Alma whenever her face showed to him from her mother's embrace.

And a few feet from the re-united mother and her daughter were Consuello and his mother! Mrs. Gallant was smiling and patting Consuello's hand, which she held in both her own!

Wondering what had happened to bring about such a happy scene, John strode toward it, smiling his happiest. He was about to speak when Mrs. Sprockett, allowing Alma to go to her father, grasped Consuello's hand

and holding it tight against her breast, cried softly:

"My dear, my dear, oh, what you have done for us! My dear, my dear."

He turned to his mother for an explanation.

"Consuello brought Alma back," Mrs. Gallant said. Then, lifting her face to kiss him, she whispered, "Forgive me, my boy, for my unkindness to her and to you."

She turned to Consuello.

"Come, my dear," she said, "you must have dinner with us."

Mrs. Sprockett hurried after her husband, who had started toward their home with the baby on one arm and the other around Alma's shoulders. John took Consuello's hand and whispered to her, "You wonderful, wonderful girl."

Inside, while Mrs. Gallant rearranged the dinner table and prepared portions for three instead of two, she related to him what had occurred.

"On the way to the studio this morning," she said, "I bought a copy of your paper to read what you had written about—about what happened last night. I saw in the paper the photograph of this girl who was missing and, just by chance, I noticed the address of her home and realized it must be close to your own. For that reason, I suppose, I gave the

picture more than a passing glance, although I thought little of it.

"I had no sooner arrived at the studio than this girl came running up to me and begged me to help her become a motion picture actress. Because the picture was still fresh in my mind I recognized her, although it was some time before I got her to admit that she had run away from home. I talked to her and told her what a mistake she had made and finally she said that, if I wanted her to, she would return home. So I brought her home and, truly, you would think I had done something wonderful by the way your mother and Mrs. Sprockett thanked me."

"You did," he said, realizing that by her act of bringing home the runaway Alma she had, unknowingly, won his mother to her.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because everything you do, everything about you is wonderful," he said, justifying himself for the evasion by knowing that his answer was truthful, at least.

* * * * *

In his imagination John enjoyed picturing the four principal streets of Los Angeles—Broadway, Spring, Main and Hill—as different types of girls much in the same way that he looked upon houses, particularly old ones, as people.

Broadway he pictured as the ultra-modern girl, gay, sparkling, witty, brilliant, temperamental; busily enjoying every minute of life; clad always in the most down-to-the-moment styles. He imagined her as popular, colorful, a wonderful companion for a happy, festive mood; a street that looked upon her companion streets as a debutante looks upon her older sisters.

Her faults he placed as tempestuous, born of an excess of nervous energy; a desire to stay up too late and keep others up with her; an insatiable love for beautiful, costly things; a super-abundance of light-heartedness and a touch of light-headedness and a spirit of utter irresponsibility.

A tempting street, a flirting street, almost a flapper street.

Hill street he thought of as older, quieter, more thoughtful and sedate; a book-loving, home-loving sort of a girl; mildly reproving but secretly admiring her sister street, Broadway. She took pride, he thought, in Pershing Square, a restful spot in the roar of the downtown thoroughfares that was like a cool hand on a fevered brow, a kind thought for others, a touch of unselfishness.

A steady, calm, sweet girl; the kind of a girl whom everyone knows would make a wonderful wife and mother, but whom few ever marry.

One to turn to in trouble, to rely upon and to always find ready to serve; less popular than her companion streets, gentler, less strident.

A beautiful girl in church on Sunday mornings, but a wallflower at a dance.

Main street was the girl of old Los Angeles, the daughter of the dons, dark-eyed, mysterious, quaintly and languidly entrancing, he pictured her always with a rose in her midnight-black hair, perhaps a black lace fan dangling at her wrist; wearing the dress of other days with shining black beads and flounces and trinkets—scorned by Miss Broadway as so much tinsel—conceding only her rouge and powder to modernism.

Haughtily proud of her origin, pointing to her birthplace—the Plaza—in its shabby, tumbled-down setting as the birthplace of the city. A girl speaking Spanish, softly and beautifully, and knowing instinctively the steps of the bewitching La Jota.

A hint of Carmen; a romantic girl. A girl for a stroll in the moonlight and a kiss upon taunting lips.

And Spring street!

She had a touch of each of her companions, Broadway's brilliant beauty; Hill street's charming character and Main street's pride of ancestry. And yet so different from them all!

An independent girl, versatile and elusive; tasting of life deeper than her companions; with rich men of the world lovers. Sophisticated, whole-hearted, generous; regretting with those who loved her the passing of the days when she held her arms open to bon vivants and epicures.

A chic girl whom you thought of as having a past. An adventurous girl, counting among those who were her followers a host of varied characters from Le Compte Davis, the bibliophile lawyer, chuckling over Schopenhauer's pessimism between hours of study over his law books, to Barney Oldfield, the racing driver, who deserted her to become a manufacturer; Jim Jeffries, former world's heavyweight pugilist, who was her companion in his fame and who left her to become a rancher; and Al Levy, who wined her and dined her in his cafe.

All this musing John related to Consuello in the wonderfully happy evenings that followed Mrs. Gallant's conversion from disliking to loving the girl he adored.

He told her he could never decide which of the four he liked best. He said sometimes Broadway had shaken her bobbed curls at him, smiling and bright, pretty and stylish, and he was captivated. Then, perhaps, a little remorseful that he had pursued so fleeting a

beauty as Broadway, he had turned to Hill street to be comforted by her soundness and to tell her, in his heart, that she was a "real" girl, so much more worth-while than her light-hearted sister, who wanted to be going and going all the time.

And nights, when he felt a longing for the stories of the old days, or, perhaps, to see the intriguing shadows of her dark eyes, he visited Main street, wandering away at times into Chinatown, clinging like a faithful servant to the feet of the daughter of the dons.

When he had tired of all three, Broadway, Hill and Main, he told her, he had turned to Spring street and found her ever alluring and interesting. It was there, in George Blake's gymnasium, that he had trained for the bout at Vernon and it was there that "Gink" Cummings had held sway, manipulating Gibson like a puppet, ruling with an iron hand, ordering his gangsters to "bash" whoever opposed him and collecting his ill-gotten tributes.

"Do you remember," she asked, "that day we met and how when you said you were frightened and embarrassed I told you that I had read stories of reporters who never knew fear and that in plays and books the reporter always did the bravest things?"

He smiled back to her.

"And I told you that it was like a story or

a play when you rescued me from the servant who had asked me to leave?" he added. "I told you then that you were a beautiful heroine and pointed out Gibson to you as the villain."

"And you said that in books and plays dreams came true and when I asked you what dream you wished to come true you said, 'A rather silly, hopeless, golden sort of dream—a dream of meeting you again,' " she supplemented.

"A dream that came true far more wonderfully than I ever hoped it would," he said.

They were beside her open casement window. It was a warm, bright Sunday morning and in a few minutes they would leave to meet his mother for the long-deferred visit to the home of Consuello's parents.

"There have been stories of all kinds, told and untold, about Spring street," he said, "but do you know the one I like best?"

She shook her head.

"The story you told to me of how it received its name," he said. "And do you know why?"

Again she shook her head.

"Because you are to me 'Mi Primavera'—My Springtime."

They entered the waiting automobile to be whirled through the city and out to the

romantic hacienda where the languorous past so strangely and sweetly blended with the vital present and the throbbing promise of a future filled with love and life together.

The motor swung around a corner and into a throbbing thoroughfare down the long, crowded course of which was pictured in an almost perpetual perspective panorama the rushing torrent, the back-wash, the undertow, the placid pools and the spectators upon the banks of the gigantic river of human endeavor.

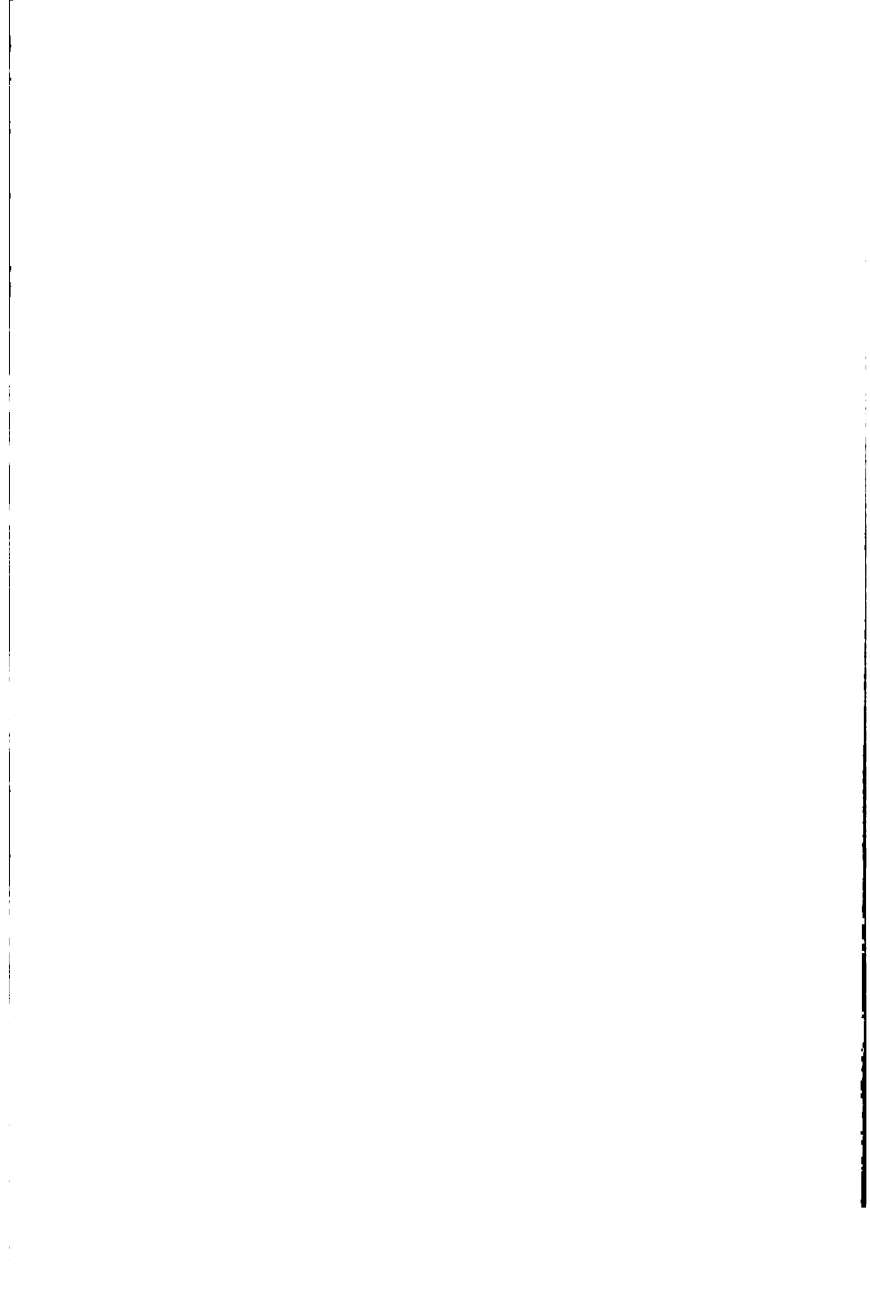
Through the cinema of John Gallant's mind there swept a thought that here was presented a prophecy and a promise. Hand in hand they would meet whatever the coming days might bring—toil, failure, happiness, success. Love was the magic wand that made them all as one.

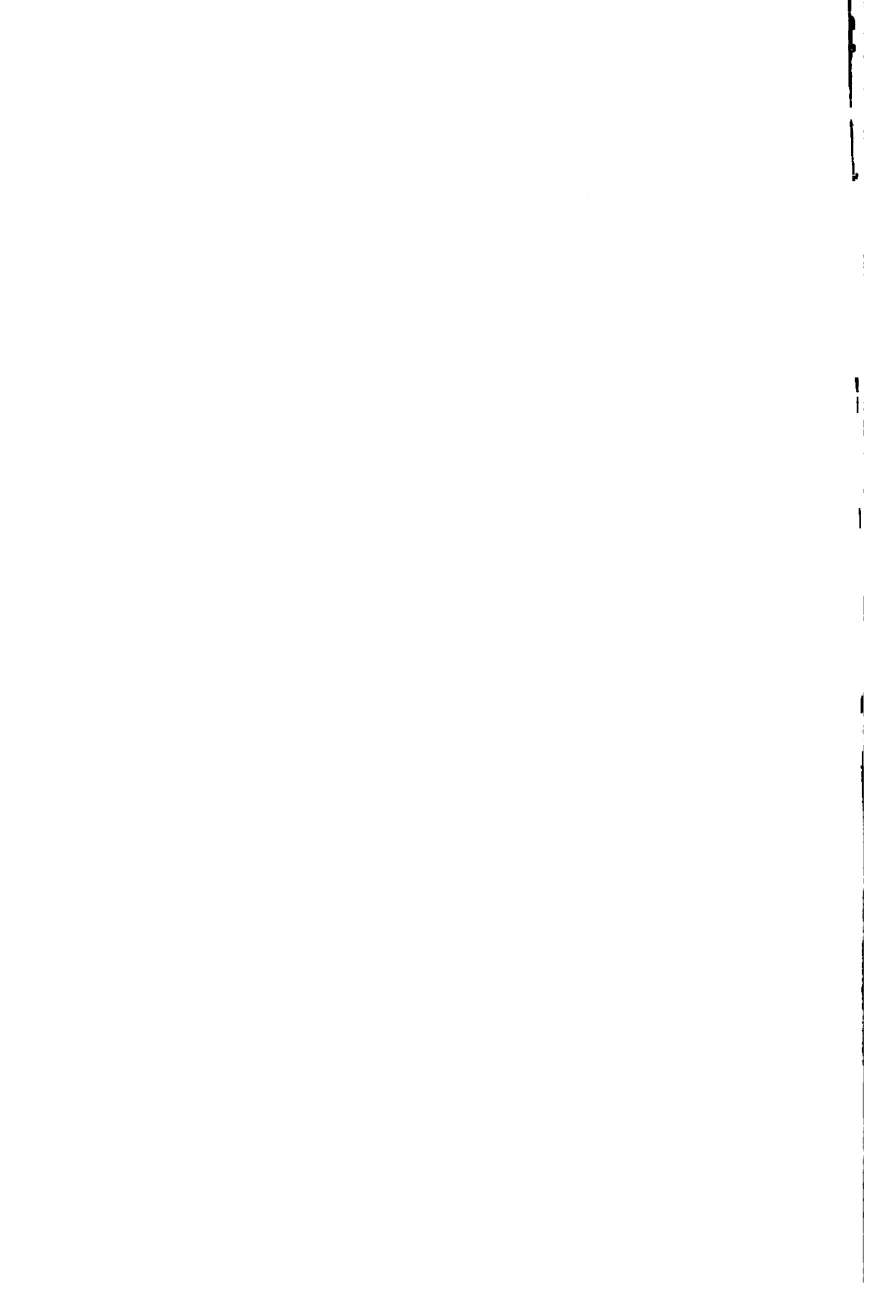
Steadily he clasped her warm, trusting fingers as they nestled in his palm.

"We are starting down our Spring street, Mi Primavera," he said.

And as she looked up into his ardent eyes he knew that all his fondest dreams were coming true.

THE END.







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